

More than 35,000 illegal immigrants held in Italy

ROME (AFP) — A total of 35,200 illegal immigrants have been held in Italy since the beginning of the year, police said Saturday as more than 300 clandestines were caught off the Italian coast in the past two days. The number of illegal immigrants in Italy is believed to be between 200,000 and 300,000, according to Italian government estimates. They are mostly Albanians, Kosovars and Kurds. A total of 48,272 illegal immigrants have been deported since the beginning of the year, of whom 40,000 were sent home after a new, stricter immigration law went into effect in March. Officially, Italy has 1.2 million legal immigrants, up 25 per cent from two years ago. The largest minority group is from Morocco, representing 10.6 per cent of immigrants, followed by Albanians, which account for 6.8 per cent.

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Jordan to observe holiday on Saturday

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan will observe a public holiday on Saturday, Jan. 2, 1999 on the occasion of the New Year, an informed source said. The source said an official communique was expected soon to announce the holiday, which usually falls on Jan. 1, but since the first day of 1999 is a Friday, the Kingdom will observe the holiday on Saturday.

Plane with 14 passengers crashes

LISBON (R) — The United Nations said a transport plane with 14 people aboard crashed on Saturday in central Angola, some of fighting between UNITA rebels and government troops, the Portuguese news agency Lusa reported. Lusa said the U.N. observation mission in Angola, MONUA, issued a statement in Luanda saying the C-130 plane, carrying 10 passengers and four crew, had caught fire shortly after taking off from the central highland town of Huambo.

Iraq's TV channel comes back on

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq's second TV channel, Al Shabab, came back on the air late Saturday after a ten day break following last week's U.S. and British missile attacks. Both Al Shabab and the third channel, Iraqi Satellite Channel, were cut off after the first night of cruise missile attacks on the capital on December 16. Iraqi Satellite Channel is still off the air. Al Shabab, or Youth TV, is run by Iraq's President Saddam Hussein's eldest son Uday. Iraq's first channel stayed on throughout the bombardment.

Yemenis can avoid army with \$20 fee

SANAA (AP) — Yemenis can now avoid the country's compulsory two-year military service by paying the equivalent of \$20. President Ali Abdullah Saleh has approved a bill that allows men to avoid the draft by paying 15 per cent of a conscript's monthly salary of \$5.60 for the two-year period, the official Al Thawra newspaper reported Saturday. That amounts to a total of \$20.

FBI asks Palestinians for help in solving murder

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — The FBI put advertisements in a number of Palestinian newspapers on Friday, asking for help in solving a 13-year-old murder. The FBI is asking anyone who has information about the killing of Ismael Michel Odeh in a bomb attack in Santa Ana, California, on Oct. 11, 1985, to come forward. The agency is offering a one million dollar reward. Odeh, who came originally from the West Bank, was an official of the Arab American Anti-Defamation League.

Turkey not ready to lift death penalty

ANKARA (AP) — President Suleyman Demirel on Saturday said he disapproved of a government bid to abolish the death penalty to gain the confidence from Italy of a Kurdish rebel leader, who is wanted here on terrorism charges. "Turkey is not ready for the lifting of the death penalty," Demirel told reporters in a year-end news conference. The government has drafted a bill to replace the death penalty with life in prison. The aim is to win the confidence of Abdullah Ocalan.

Iraq says planes raid southern post

Ramadan: Iraq will fire on planes patrolling zones

BAGHDAD (Agencies) — Iraq said its air defences fired at Western planes attacking a post in southern Iraq on Saturday in the first reported clash since a U.S. and British air campaign ended a week ago.

The United States and Britain denied the report. An Iraqi military spokesman, quoted by the Iraqi News Agency (INA), said: "At 11:25 (0825 GMT) this morning formations of enemy planes... attacked one of our air defence positions which confronted them and forced them to drop their load indiscriminately."

The Iraqi armed forces usually use the term "confronted" to mean firing anti-aircraft weapons. It was the first time Iraq had said it fired at Western planes since the four-day blitz by U.S. and British forces.

The spokesman did not say exactly where the incident took place but said the planes, flying in from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, had violated the Iraqi airspace at 9:15 a.m. on Saturday. He said the first wave of "the crows" flew outside the range of anti-aircraft guns.

In Washington, a spokesman for the U.S. National Security Council, P.J. Crowley, said: "There was no attack. We had

footage of what it said showed the aftermath of two rockets fired on Tuesday at air defence targets near Basra. It was not possible to verify that the rockets were fired on Tuesday or during the air campaign. The army said on Thursday Western planes violated Iraq's southern airspace for a third straight day but did not report any exchanges of fire.

Iraq has claimed victory in last week's confrontations, but said the "aggression" continued and it remained on alert. The U.S. and Britain said they halted the raids after they achieved their target of containing President Saddam Hussein.

A Ministry of Defence official in London said that a British pilot reported fire at a considerable distance, but said it was not hostile. "We checked with our forces and no one was fired on, or fired at anyone," he said. Iraqi state media later released pictures and film

planes up enforcing the no-fly zone" over Iraq, which is part of normal operations. A Pentagon spokesman said that at about 3:15 a.m. EST (8:15 GMT) the pilots of two British Tornados patrolling the southern no-fly zone in Iraq reported seeing bursts of anti-aircraft fire about eight kilometres to their rear. "They exited the no-fly zone," said the spokesman. U.S. Army Major Paul Phillips.

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Iraq to ask Arab MPs meeting in Amman to break U.N. embargo

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraq said Saturday it would ask a meeting of Arab parliamentarians in Amman Sunday to denounce U.N. sanctions and call for punishment of the United States and Britain for their air strikes against the country last week.

The official Iraqi News Agency INA said Iraq's Parliament speaker Saudun Hammedi left Baghdad for Amman Saturday to attend the meeting, called to discuss the raids. "We will ask the meeting to adopt resolutions committing Arab governments to break the embargo on Iraq," Hammedi said, quoted by INA.

"The Iraqi delegation will brief Arab MPs on the size of destruction and casualties caused by American-British aggression against Iraqi civilian installations," he said.

"The aggressors should be punished... and Iraq should be given its right by demanding complete compensation for the human and material losses," he added.

The Iraqi parliament debated Saturday a draft resolution on the attacks.

"We are debating a draft resolution to denounce the aggression and to hold America and Britain fully responsible for the impact of the Iraqi aggression against the Iraqi

people," MP Hasib Aref told Reuters.

The Iraqi press also called for lifting U.N. sanctions. One newspaper said that removing chief U.N. weapons inspector Richard Butler from his post would not be enough to allow U.N. inspectors to return to Baghdad.

"Our prediction is that the Security Council would dismiss the Australian bill, Butler, from his post," Babel, owned by President Saddam Hussein's eldest son Uday, said.

"But our people whose wounds had not healed yet following the Zionist-imperialist aggression will not accept anything less than lifting the embargo," the paper said.

Babel, Iraq's most influential newspaper, said the council would push Russia to convince Iraq to accept the return of the U.N. Special Commission, charged with dismantling Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

The United States and Britain launched four days of air strikes on Iraq last week after Butler said in a report Baghdad was not cooperating fully with his inspectors. The inspectors pulled out of Baghdad hours before the attacks started.

7 Arab countries confirm attending League meeting

CAIRO (AFP) — Seven Arab foreign ministers have so far confirmed that they will attend a meeting here next week to discuss the situation in Iraq, the Arab League said Saturday.

Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan, Syria and Yemen have all officially accepted a League invitation to Wednesday's meeting.

Meanwhile in Beirut, officials said Saturday that Lebanon would also send a representative to the meeting but had not yet confirmed the plan with the League.

Six other members, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, the Palestinian National Authority and the UAE have responded favourably, but have not confirmed the attendance of their foreign ministers.

The other eight members have not made their intentions known, but "no League member has come out against holding the meeting," League officials said.

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Netanyahu denies elections are stalling peace pact

TEL AVIV (AP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Saturday denied Palestinian charges that he suspended the Wye River peace accord because of upcoming elections, saying that Palestinian non-compliance is responsible for the freeze.

Netanyahu told Israel Radio that he would implement the two-month old U.S.-brokered accord once the Palestinians did their part, including collecting Palestinian police and civilians.

Netanyahu criticised the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) for releasing Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin from house arrest on Wednesday and permitting a Palestinian jailed for killing two Israelis to have "passed through the revolving door, exited, and escaped outside," the radio said.

The PNA was carrying out a manhunt for Jamil Jidala who escaped from a Nablus jail earlier this week.

The Palestinians suggested early elections for prime

minister, expected by late April, were responsible for the freeze.

"This Israeli government continues to be a government, responsible for its commitments," chief Palestinian negotiator Sach Erekat said after Friday night's meeting of the Palestinian cabinet in the West Bank town of Hebron.

The call for early elections was triggered by lawmakers' rejection of Netanyahu's peace policies, and how and whether to implement the peace pact is already a major campaign

issue.

Israel has refused to go ahead with promised troop pull backs from the West Bank unless the Palestinians meet a series of conditions. Those include a renunciation of Palestinian claims to the right to declare statehood in May 1999 whether or not terms have been agreed on with Israel.

But the Palestinian cabinet said in a statement following its meeting that it would continue making preparations for a statehood declaration in May.

The Palestinians also said they would seek help from the Arab World and the rest of the international community to "confront the freezing of the peace process."

The cabinet called Israeli non-compliance with the accord a "dangerous development which was initiated by the Israeli government without any reason besides its rejection of peace."

Saturday, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo to discuss the frozen agreement.

Lebanon on alert for possible Israeli strike

BEIRUT (R) — Lebanon said on Saturday it was maintaining vigilance against an expected Israeli attack following increased tension between the Jewish state and Hizbollah guerrillas in south Lebanon.

"Israel is an aggressive state and looking at its previous assaults on Lebanon, we do not rule out the possibility that it will attack Lebanon," Defence Minister Ghazi Zaiter told state television Teleliban.

"We will be attentive to Israeli practices and threats to hit the infrastructure and Lebanese economy," said Zaiter.

The Israeli cabinet headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will weigh on Sunday its

response to Hizbollah firing of Katyusha rockets into northern Israel early on Wednesday.

Israel has vowed to avenge the attacks, which Hizbollah said were in retaliation for the killing of a woman and six of her children in an Israeli air raid on the Bekaa Valley on Tuesday.

Israel, which has controlled parts of south Lebanon since 1978, set up a 15 km deep "security" zone in 1985, saying it needed to protect its borders from potential guerrilla attacks.

In 1996 Israel launched a 17-day blitz on Lebanon that killed around 200 people.

Egypt wants U.S. to pressure Israel to implement Wye

CAIRO (AFP) — Egypt called on the United States on Saturday to press Israel into relaunching the frozen Middle East peace process and fulfilling its commitments to the Palestinians under the Wye River accord.

"We hope the Americans will exert some pressure on the Israelis to get them to uphold what is signed in front of [U.S.] President Bill Clinton," Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa said.

Speaking to reporters here after a meeting between Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Musa said Israel had "obstructed" implementation of the accord — brokered by Clinton — even before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Monday for early elections.

Israel announced Tuesday it was halting further troop withdrawals from the West Bank as laid out in the Wye accord, prompting concern that the pact would be put on hold until after the elections, expected in April.

Musa said Arafat told Mubarak that "the implementation of other clauses in the Wye accord is completely threatened and damages the peace process."

Musa added that the Palestinians "confirmed that they honoured all their commitments" in the agreement and said the Israeli freeze on its

implementation was "illegal and in violation of what they signed."

Arafat arrived with a Palestinian delegation in Cairo Saturday for talks with Mubarak on the latest impasse in the peace process.

Meanwhile, a top Palestinian official said in the West Bank Saturday that the Palestinians were seeking a high-level meeting in Washington next month to get the United States to force Israel to honour the Wye agreement.

The Palestinian National Authority wants Washington to take "a firm position towards the cynical policies of the Israeli government," Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said.

He accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his allies of using the current political crisis in Israel, where early elections have been called after the collapse of Netanyahu's ruling coalition, to "achieve their hidden aim of putting an end to the peace process."

"We shall tell the American administration that it is unacceptable for them to continue to close their eyes to these manoeuvres," he said.

Abed Rabbo said the initiative was part of a diplomatic campaign decided by the Palestinian leadership at a meeting in the West Bank town of Hebron on Friday aimed at "avoiding the lapse of the peace process."

King expected back during 'Eid

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Hussein is expected to leave the Mayo Clinic in the U.S. in a few days after completing all phases of treatment, a senior official said Saturday. "It is expected that His Majesty King Hussein will depart Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, in a few days, after completing all phases of treatment," the official told the Jordan Times. "His Majesty has fully recovered from lymphatic cancer," said the official, but His Majesty needs a recuperation period which he is expected to spend in Washington and London, before coming back home. The official also said that the King will return home during 'Eid Al Fitr holidays. King Hussein concluded six cycles of chemotherapy for lymphoma since he arrived at Rochester on July 14.



CHRISTMAS GOOD WISHES: HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, on Saturday expresses good wishes to Patriarch Michel Sabbah, head of the Roman Catholic community in Jordan and Palestine, on the occasion of Christmas and New Year (see page 3 story) (photo by Yusef Al 'Allan)

JMA to send physicians to examine Jordanian prisoners held in Israel

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — The Jordan Medical Association on Saturday decided to send physicians to examine 14 Jordanian prisoners held in Israeli jails, an association official said.

Association Secretary Ahmad Armouti said JMA President Bassem Dajani "accepted in principle to send a team of Jordanian doctors for that purpose after a formal request is received from the Foreign Ministry."

The JMA, a stronghold of anti-normalisation with Israel, together with 13 other professional unions have threatened to expel any of their members who visits Israel or is involved

in deals with the Jewish state.

Officials said the association's decision to send a team of Jordanian doctors "on a purely humanitarian mission" to examine the Jordanian prisoners, many of them suffering from serious psychological and health problems, posed the toughest yet test to their resolve in keeping up with their promise to fight normalisation.

Armouti pointed out that the association is studying several options including: sending doctors from east Jerusalem who are members of the Jordanian association, or Palestinian doctors residing in Jordan, or other physicians carrying other nationalities.

"In order not to violate the

unions decision to resist normalisation, we are studying all options in addition to who should be on the delegation," Armouti said.

Meanwhile, Jordan's ambassador to Tel Aviv Omar Rifai, welcomed the association's decision. "We will contact the association immediately in order to get the list of the delegation and their specialities. Then we'll arrange all necessary clearances needed from the Israeli authorities," Rifai told the Jordan Times.

He expected the mission to be accomplished within the coming two weeks. "We will be offering all facilities needed for making that mission a success," Rifai added.

In November, the Jordanian embassy got an Israeli approval to send physicians to examine the prisoners.

The issue was raised after a visit on Oct. 20 by family members of 12 prisoners held in Israel. The visit was the first to be approved by the Israeli government under the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty.

"Due to the fact that medical attention is not expected to be adequate in any prison, we will offer the prisoners general health examinations to determine their health conditions then provide them with any special care they need," Rifai said.

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Turkey opposes deployment of Cypriot missiles in Greece

ANKARA (AFP) — Deployment of Cypriot-purchased ground-to-air missiles in Greece instead of Cyprus would damage relations between Turkey and its Aegean rival, a foreign ministry official said here Friday.

"No decision has been made on the S-300s, but if they were deployed on Crete, that would create new problems between Turkey and Greece," the official warned.

"It is understood that Crete is Greek territory but the arrival of these weapons on the island will only increase the tension between Ankara and Athens which are both NATO members," he said.

There has been mounting

pressure on the Cypriot government in recent months to find an alternative home for the advanced missiles it ordered from Russia last year after Turkey threatened to knock them out if they are deployed on the divided island as planned later this year.

On Thursday, Greek-Cypriot officials said the country's all-party National Council was leaning toward storing the S-300s in Greece.

The comments followed an extraordinary session of the council, which declined to announce whether it had reached a decision on what to do with the controversial missiles.

The council is a top presi-

dential advisory body comprised of leaders of all the parties represented in parliament. Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides is scheduled to meet Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis Tuesday to discuss the issue. Clerides said he will brief the National Council when he returns and that it would make the final decision.

Meanwhile Turkish-Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş said Friday that Clerides failed to tell the Greek-Cypriot population the truth about the island's division.

"Clerides must change his policies and tell his people the truth — that it is the Greek-Cypriot leaders who are responsible for the island's

division," he said, quoted by the Anatolia news agency.

"It is not only a question of renouncing the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The existence of two states is a necessity for the security of the island," he said.

Cyprus has been divided since Turkey occupied its northern third in 1974 following a Greek-backed coup in Nicosia intended to unite the island with Greece.

Turkish-Cypriot officials declared the breakaway TRNC in 1983, but it is recognised only by Ankara, which maintains 35,000 troops in the north of the eastern Mediterranean island.

Turkey's Demirel hopeful of progress in EU ties

ANKARA (R) — President Suleyman Demirel on Saturday expressed hope for improvement in Turkey's stalled ties with the European Union and said the country would remain dedicated to adopting European standards.

Turkey's relations with the 15-nation bloc cooled a year ago when the EU put Ankara's membership bid on hold, citing its shaky human rights record and disputes with Greece.

Turkish authorities then angrily struck back, cutting off political dialogue with the bloc.

The EU softened its stance last month, saying Turkey should be considered a candidate while still remaining outside the membership negotiations. This fell short of satisfying Ankara.

"I hope the existing crisis in our relations with Europe will be definitely removed one day," Demirel said in an annual round-up news conference.

Demirel's remarks appeared to be a sign of willingness to thaw relations. But he said the EU should legally confirm Turkey's candidacy, an ambitious bid dating back to the 1960s, in order to break the impasse.

"We should reach European standards in every area. I want to emphasise that this is of great importance,"

Turkey, an overwhelmingly Muslim but officially secular country, has maintained the goal of coming closer to Europe since it was forged as a modern republic from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire in 1923.

However, Western governments considering closer ties with Turkey have been put off by Ankara's military-led clampdown on Islamist activists and its conflict with minority Kurds.

The influential Turkish army forced the country's first Islamist prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan, to quit

last year and Erbakan later was barred from political leadership as his party was banned by a court on sedition charges.

Turkey, a NATO member, has also come under fire from European allies for its heavy-handed tactics against the Kurdish campaign for self rule in the southeast of the country.

The arrival of rebel Kurdish Labour Party leader Abdullah Ocalan in EU-member Italy renewed debate on a negotiated solution to the 14 years of conflict which have claimed more than 29,000 lives.

Turkey opposes any negotiations with Kurdish guerrillas, dubbing them "terrorists," and seeks Ocalan's extradition for trial on treason charges. Italy says it is constitutionally barred from extraditing a suspect to any country, like Turkey, where the death penalty is on the statute books.

Iraqi opposition meet U.S., UK officials

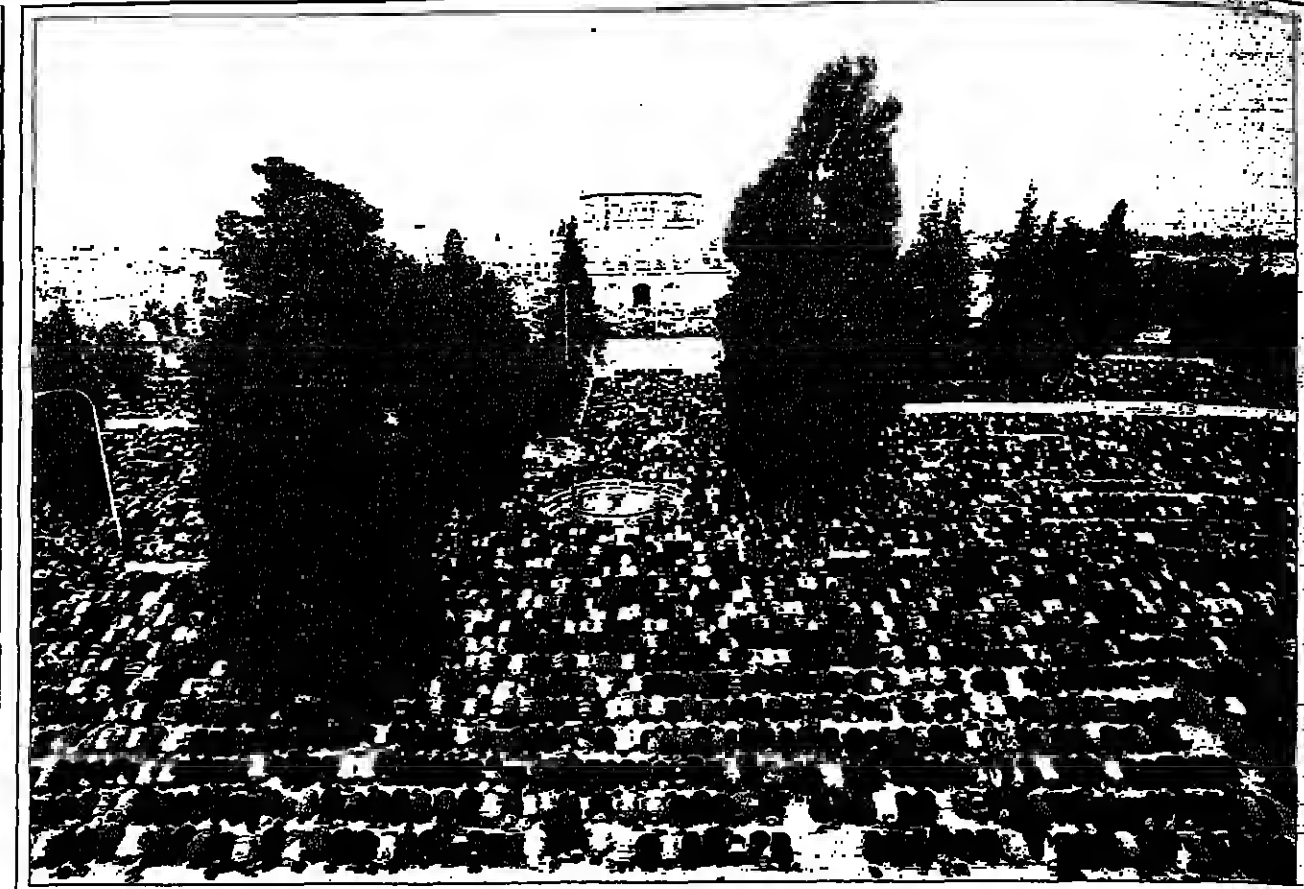
DUBAI (AFP) — A leading Iraqi opposition group said Friday that it had held two meetings with U.S. and British officials on creating a unified opposition to topple Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

"The formation of an opposition political entity was the subject of two November meetings in London," said Hamid Al Bayati, London representative for the Tehran-based Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq.

In a statement received here he said a variety of opposition leaders and independents met separately with British junior Foreign Office Minister Derek Fatchett and U.S. Undersecretary of State for the Middle East Martin Indyk.

Bayati said there had been no discussion of establishing an armed opposition, and that the talks had centred only on reforming the inactive Iraqi National Congress or forming a new umbrella opposition group.

The United States and Britain have been increasingly open about their desire to overthrow Saddam, particularly after last week's air bombardment of Iraq.



PRAYING AT AL AQSA MOSQUE: Muslims pray at Al Aqsa Mosque with the Dome of the Rock behind in Jerusalem's Old City on the first Friday noon prayer of the Holy Month of Ramadan. About 200,000 Muslim worshippers from Jerusalem, the West Bank and Israel performed Friday's prayer under Israeli tight security. Palestinian Muslim leader Sheikh Akramah Sabri called for 'the liberation' of the holy city and the 'entire holy land of Palestine' in his weekly prayer sermon (AFP photo)

Ben Laden accuses Saudi of murder plot

ISLAMABAD (R) — Exiled Saudi dissident Osama Ben Laden accused the Saudi Arabian government in an interview published Saturday of plotting to kill him.

The bid was foiled by Afghanistan's Taliban militia, his hosts, Ben Laden was quoted as saying. "Thanks to Allah, the assassination attempt failed," Pakistan's English-language daily The News quoted him as saying.

All the three men were arrested and were being held in prison in Kandahar, the Taliban headquarters, it said.

One of the plotters "was offered one million Saudi riyals and the nationality of Saudi Arabia to accomplish the mission," Ben Laden was quoted as saying. He was interviewed Wednesday night at a secret location near the southern Afghan city of Kandahar, the paper said.

The United States accuses

Ben Laden of masterminding the bombings of two of its embassies in Africa in August in which 253 people died. Washington has offered a record \$5 million reward for information leading to his arrest and conviction.

The Saudi billionaire has been living in exile in Afghanistan and the ruling Taliban religious army, which controls most of the country, has refused to hand him over. The Taliban say he is an honoured guest and will be protected in keeping with Afghan tradition.

Ben Laden, in an interview broadcast by ABC News Thursday, denied that he was behind the attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania but said he supported them and knew some of those involved.

Aiman Al Zawahiri, head of Egypt's Islamic Jihad militant group and a friend of Ben Laden, was quoted by The News as saying that one of the

alleged plotters was a Saudi-born descendant of migrants from Central Asia, had made a confession and provided details of the assassination plot.

It was not clear where Zawahiri was when interviewed.

Zawahiri said the man's suspicious movements led to his arrest in Khosht, eastern Afghanistan, some time after a U.S. missile attack in August on suspected terrorist camps run by Ben Laden in the area.

The man concerned was one of a minority in Saudi Arabia who originated in Central Asia and are still denied Saudi nationality, Zawahiri said.

"That is why he was tempted with Saudi nationality and monetary reward and agreed to kill Ben Laden," the Taliban Islamic movement said Thursday. No new training camps were being set up in Afghanistan by Ben Laden or any other Islamic group.

Greek coast guard snares illegal immigrants

ATHENS (AFP) — The Greek coast guard arrested 40 illegal Iraqi and Afghan immigrants on the island of Ikaria, in the eastern Aegean Sea, the merchant marine ministry said Saturday.

It said 33 were from Iraq, and listed 19 men, six women and 15 children.

They reached the island on Friday aboard a 13-metre wooden boat, with a five-person Turkish crew who slipped away before the coast guard arrived.

The immigrants told police they left Turkey on Tuesday for Italy, but the boat's captain dropped them on Ikaria after they ran into bad weather.

Iraqis light Christmas trees 'soaked with tears'

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraqis lit two Christmas trees "soaked with tears" outside a U.N. office and the former building of the United States diplomatic mission in Baghdad.

Christmas celebrations in Iraq were subdued in a country recovering from four days of intensive U.S. and British air strikes and under punishing eight-year-old U.N. trade sanctions.

In the northern city of Mosul bishops said they

would not celebrate the day as a protest against last week's raids.

"The heads of the Christian sects in the north agreed not to hold official celebrations because of the aggression against our beloved country and in solidarity with our people," a bishop told Reuters.

Iraq's 24 million population are mainly Muslims, but Christians form a substantial minority. In Baghdad, signs of celebration among the Christian community were limited.

Shortly after a traditional Mass on Christmas eve, air raid sirens sounded. The all clear was given minutes later and there were no exchanges of fire or official explanation.

The U.S. and Britain bombed Iraq after U.N. weapons inspectors disarming Baghdad said the authorities were not cooperating fully. Iraq has since said the inspectors were spies and will not be allowed back.

Two 10-foot Christmas trees were lit, one outside the

United Nations Development Programme offices on the banks of Tigris River and the other outside the building formerly used by American diplomats and currently occupied by the Polish embassy, which is looking after U.S. interests.

Both trees put up by the authorities had a Star of Bethlehem on top and were decorated with scores of paper stars, each bearing the name and age of an infant Iraq says died because of sanctions.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

15:10 Cartoon — The Pink Panther
15:20 The Pumpkin Patch
15:30 Lift Off
16:00 Doc. — Big Cat Diary
16:30 Ch. 2 Links with Ch. 1
17:00 Le Grand Secret
18:15 Omar Ben Abdul Aziz
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Words of Wisdom
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Comedy — The Brittas Empire
20:00 Journey Across the Land of Islam
20:30 Drama — Walker, Texas Ranger
21:15 Doc. — Faring & Ecology
21:30 Entertainment — Behind the Scenes
22:00 News in English
22:30 Melissa
23:10 Drama — Doogie Howser
23:59 End of T.C.

PRAYER TIMES

05:07 Fajr
06:29 (Sunrise) Duha
11:37 Dhuhr
14:21 Asr
16:44 Maghreb
18:06 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifeh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4632785

St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terro Sancta Church Tel.
4622366
Anglican Church Tel.
4624853/4624811
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox
Church Tel. 4771751
Amman International Church
Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church
in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter
Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la
Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation
Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel.
4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifeh
Tel. 5920146
The United Catholic Church
Tel. 4634757
The English-Language
Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel.
4892679
The Baptist Church Tel.
4628052
The Armenian Catholic
Church Tel. 4771331
The American Orthodox
Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Depart-

ment of Meteorology

Temperatures are expected to rise slightly, skies partly cloudy, and winds easterly moderate. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate, and seas choppy.

Amman 07/13
Aqaba 08/20
Deserts 05/15
Jordan Valley 10/19

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 11, Aqaba 19 Humidity
readings: Amman 78 per cent,
Aqaba 60 per cent.

Following are the temperatures
expected today in the following
areas:

Ajloun 03/10
Jerash 04/14
Um Qays 04/14
Madaba 03/13
Petra 04/14
Dead Sea 10/22

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Bassam Karadshah 4389200
Dr. Khalid M'addi 5661144
Dr. Salman Daboulhi 5812518
Dr. Ramzi Mazzawi 4894788

AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy 5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy 5537004
Ruka Al Dawa Pharmacy 5336169

IRBID:
Dr. Issam Al Salih 021246858
Fou'ad Pharmacy 021275360

ZARQA:
Dr. Samir Al Lawzi (09)899601
Palestine Pharmacy (09)983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192 4621111 4637777
Fire Brigade 4617101
Blood Bank 4775121
Highway Police 5343402
Traffic Police 4896390
Public Security Dept. 4630321
Hotel Complaints 5605800
Price Complaints 5661176
Water & Sewerage Complaints 4894767
Amman Municipality Complaints 4787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 0132
Central Amman Telephone Repair 4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101
Jordan Television 4773111

Radio Jordan 4774111
Water Authority 5680100
J. Electricity Authority 5815615
Electric Power Co. 4636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Int. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199
The Islamic Abdi 5666131/7
Husseini Medical Centre 5856836
Luzmila 4630195
Khalidi Maternity 464281/6
Akileh Maternity 464241/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362
Malhas, J. Amman 4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital 5607431
Jordan Hospital 5607550
University Hospital 5353444
Al-Musharraf Hospital 566727/9
Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 4771101/3
Al-Bashir 4775111/2
Army, Marka 4891611/5
Queen Alia Hospital 5171100
Amal Hospital 5607155
Al Amal Cancer Centre 5353000

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986731
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)75555
Roman Catholic Hospital (02)72275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital (02)7101372 (02)7103101
Rosary Sisters Hospital (02)7102831 (02)7103011
Specialty Hospital (02)7103100

FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 44 (52700). Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
08:25 Bombay (RJ)
08:35 Jeddah (RJ)
08:50 Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:00 Beirut (RJ)
09:50 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)

17:15 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
17:45 London (RJ)
18:05 Athens (RJ)
18:25 Madrid, Geneva (RJ)
19:20 Rome (add) (RJ)
19:25 Paris, Brussels (RJ)
19:40 Rome (RJ)
19:50 Frankfurt (RJ)
21:35 Vienna, Aqaba (RJ)
23:59 Cairo (RJ)

Other Flights

12:30 Aden (TY)
14:35 Istanbul (TK)
18:00 Dubai, Damascus (EK)
18:40 Beirut (ME)
18:45 Kiev (6U)
19:05 Paris (AF)
20:25 Tel Aviv (LY)
20:40 Cairo (MS)
22:25 London, Damascus (BA)
23:35 Amsterdam (KL)
23:55 Larnaca (CY)
00:55 Bucharest (RO)
02:00 Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

09:30 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
11:10 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
18:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
22:50 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
05:00 Aqaba, Paris (RJ)
05:30 Beirut (RJ)
10:30 Frankfurt (RJ)
10:50 Vienna (RJ)
11:15 Rome (RJ)
11:20 Rome (add) (RJ)
11:25 Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
11:30 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
12:15 Athens (RJ)
12:15 London (RJ)
20:25 Cairo (RJ)
20:30 Jeddah (RJ)
20:35 New Delhi (RJ)
20:45 Damascus (RJ)
21:00 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
22:30 Bangkok (RJ)
22:45 Sanaa (RJ)
00:10 Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta (RJ)

Other Flights

07:10 Frankfurt (LH)
13:30 Aden (TY)
15:35 Istanbul (TK)
19:00 Dubai (EK)
19:40 Kiev (6U)
20:40 Beirut (ME)
21:10 Tel Aviv (LY)
21:40 Cairo (MS)
00:35 Amsterdam (KL)
01:55 Bucharest (RO)
03:00 Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

07:00 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

Hom

Bishop / strikes o Regen religio

AMMAN — A church da bishop striking a blow to the regime's religious freedom. The bishop, who is a member of the Syrian Orthodox Church, has been in the country for some time. He is a member of the Syrian Orthodox Church, which is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world. The bishop is a member of the Syrian Orthodox Church, which is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world. The bishop is a member of the Syrian Orthodox Church, which is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world.

Evening new with mixed re

In Alla Shukri Hamze

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FILM

"Nous ne vieillirons ensemble" at the French Cultural Centre on Monday Dec 28 at 6:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

Exhibition of ceramics.

Bishop Abul Asal says recent U.S.-British air strikes on Iraq embarrassed Arab Christians Regent urges 3 monotheistic religions to work together

AMMAN (J.T.) — As Christians around the world celebrated Christmas Friday, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, urged followers of the three monotheistic faiths to coordinate their efforts to help re-establish peace and bring closer all nations of the world.

During a visit to the Latin Diocese, Prince Hassan expressed good wishes in his name and the name of his Majesty King Hussein to the Christian community in Jordan and Palestine on Christmas.

In his remarks at the meeting, Prince Hassan said that the focus now at this crucial stage of history in the region should be on the message of peace in its spiritual and comprehensive meanings.

In a statement published in the French newspaper Le Croix, the Regent said that the message of Christmas embodies the meaning and the spirit of peace and tolerance.

Addressing the French nation, the Regent said: "While you in France celebrate Christmas and enjoy the good things of the world, I hope that you give some thought to those people around the world who are deprived of Christmas joy, of the good things and of peace."

He added: "We have recently witnessed tragedies and sufferings befalling innocent people (the Iraqis) who inhabit a country close to Jordan and it is difficult to see these tragic events reconciled with the divine principles embedded in the religions of the Christians and the Muslims, which call for peace on earth."

"Only with the return to the source of our common



A clergyman Saturday offers His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, Arabic coffee during a visit to the Latin Church in Amman on the occasion of Christmas celebrations (photo by Youssef 'Allan)

beliefs and the common principles which the two religions teach can we hope to see peace established, taking the place of fear which we witness today," the Regent said.

Prince Hassan referred to the meaning of Christmas and its link to the Holy City of Bethlehem. "At this time the Christians' attention is directed towards the birthplace of Christ in Bethlehem in the West Bank in Palestine remembering the appearance of the angel from heaven before the shepherds declaring the great event of the birth of Christ and the great joy to the world."

Prince Hassan lauded the brotherly ties binding the Muslim and the Christian people and said the Holy Koran referred to the "great event of the birth of Christ."

Also on the occasion of Christmas, which was celebrated by denominations of the Christian communities in Jordan, Bishop Riyadh Abul Assal, head of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East, issued a statement urging all Christians to celebrate. "Christmas is a time when we expect joy to be ours and those of the rest of the world, a time to rejoice the birth of Christ, the Prince of Peace, to love and to extend love and peace."

Criticising the recent U.S.-British air strikes against Iraq, the Bishop said: "The children of Iraq will not have Christians presents to enjoy except those U.S. missiles of mass destruction launched against Iraq with the words Merry Christmas engraved on them."

As a result of these strikes, Arab Christians were facing a serious dilemma, he added.

"How can British Prime Minister Tony Blair present himself on public television declaring war on Iraq while a Christmas tree stands behind him? Is this not a defiance of Christianity and an embarrassment to fellow Christians. How can U.S. President Bill Clinton advocate peace in the Middle East a day before and then move to force war on Iraq?"

Denouncing the continued threat to Iraq, the Bishop said: "We call on life-loving, peace-loving people to speak out against both leaders who obviously do not value human life. This senseless violation of human rights must be stopped."

APU opens emergency meeting to discuss attack on Iraq

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — The Arab Parliamentary Union opens an emergency meeting in Amman today to discuss recent U.S.-British air strikes against Iraq and means to ease the suffering of the Iraqi people under crippling eight-year-old economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations.

With the exception of Kuwait, 16 of the 17-member APU will attend the one-day meeting, called for by the Lower House of Parliament on Monday after last week's punitive attacks on Baghdad.

Washington and London said they attacked Iraq over its alleged refusal to cooperate with United Nations weapons inspectors.

The meeting's agenda will focus on recent aggression against Iraq and its repercussions, Lower House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali told reporters on Thursday.

He also said he hoped the meeting, under the patronage of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, will come up with a unified Arab stand towards lifting the sanctions, imposed on Iraq after it invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

"We hope that Arabs will

show unity so that the decision to demand the lifting of sanctions on Iraq comes as an Arab decision," Majali said.

"We also hope that what these Arab parliaments are looking for will be acceptance by Arab governments..." he added.

Majali's stand, reportedly supported by Iraq, Syria and some other member states, is expected to pose a dilemma for other participants as most Arab governments, including the Jordanian, argue that sanctions can only be lifted once Iraq complies with United Nations Gulf War resolutions.

Under these resolutions, U.N. weapons inspectors must testify that Iraq has destroyed all its weapons of mass destruction before the sanctions are lifted.

Majali said that Kuwait had informed the general secretariat of its reasons not to attend the Amman meeting, but he did not elaborate.

However, some deputies said Kuwait told Jordan it could not attend a meeting that would come out with resolutions condemning the 70-hour air strikes on Iraq, suspended last Sunday, even though these decisions were non-binding.

Kuwait remains one of Iraq's fiercest Arab foes

since the Gulf crisis.

In addition to Jordan, delegations from Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Yemen and the Palestinians will attend today's meeting.

"Organisers will have to walk a delicate line in balancing popular pro-Iraq sentiments and most Arab official positions which were critical, or at best lukewarm, in their support for the intensive attacks on Iraq," said one deputy who requested anonymity.

"Hence, they are likely to focus more on the humanitarian aspect of the problem and how to ease the suffering of our Iraqi brethren," he told the Jordan Times.

Ahmad Fahri Sour, current APU president and speaker of the Egyptian National Assembly, told Petra he hoped the meeting would pave the way for convening an Arab League summit to revive inter-Arab unity.

"We hope that the Amman meeting will sincerely reflect the national Arab stand and help set the needed path to define the capabilities of the Arab Nation and ensure that no double standards are used when talking about imple-

menting principles of international legitimacy," Sour said.

Most Arabs have often criticised the United States for failing to halt Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from hindering already existing peace deals with the Palestinians.

The Arab League plans to hold a ministerial meeting on Wednesday at Yemen's request to consider calls to hold an Arab summit following the air and missile strikes on Iraq.

But Arab governments remain divided on the issue, with only Qatar and the UAE among the six Gulf states planning to send a government minister to Wednesday's meeting.

Jordan and Kuwait have said they would attend an Arab summit on the Iraq crisis as long as the agenda was well prepared.

The last Arab summit was held in Cairo in June 1996 at the request of Egypt following the election of Netanyahu.

It called on members to freeze further normalisation with the Jewish state in the absence of progress in the Middle East peace process which has never been implemented.

Water Authority refers 1,500 violators to court

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — The Water Authority Saturday said it had referred to court 1,500 cases involving residents receiving water illegally either by tampering with or damaging water meters.

The decision is part of a three-month-old campaign to crack down on water thefts reportedly causing the treasury a JD15 million loss every year.

Water Authority Acting Secretary General Nawaf Daoud said the cases sent to court included citizens who had obtained water illegally or had linked their houses to overall sewage system without permission.

He said the government

had stopped supplying them with water after violators were discovered.

Daoud said that violators would be charged by the prosecutor general after the amount of water they have illegally used is determined.

He said that the authority would not resume services to violators without approval from Water Minister Hani Mulki.

But other officials said violators who quickly moved to settle their situation would be allowed to pay dues under an instalment system.

Mulki has said unaccounted water losses are largely due to illegal tampering with water meters, which he estimated is behind more

than 25 per cent of overall water losses.

The government has said it was working to replace all broken water networks in order to lower the estimated 55 per cent loss rate and prevent "irresponsible and illegal" water use.

According to Mulki, the ministry spent JD11 million to repair Irbid governorate's water network in order to contain leakage estimated at 58 per cent of the total supply. But water losses dropped by only 11 per cent, which meant that 47 per cent was still used illegally.

Several government studies will be conducted throughout the Kingdom to determine the extent of

water losses, and more laws will be enacted to stop illegal use.

According to some studies cited in recent news reports, the ministry in 1995 pumped 50,220 million cubic metres of water to Amman, but 28,011 million cubic metres were lost.

A survey conducted recently among 184 citizens in the Tabarbour area of Amman revealed that 50 per cent of residents were using illegal water supplies — either by breaking or tampering with meters.

Another study also said water meter readings were sometimes less than 38 per cent of the actual amount of water consumed by citizens.

Evening newspaper received with mixed reactions

By Ali Shukri Hamzeh

AMMAN — A sixth daily newspaper, an evening publication, last week hit the news-stands catering its publishers say, for those who wish to pick up timely and updated news on their way home from work.

Al Massaiya, the only evening daily started printing last Monday.

Managing editor, Ibrahim Madaeen, said the newspaper is printing around 25,000 copies "on trial basis, and we hope by the next couple of months to increase that number to double," he added.

He told the Jordan Times that the 24-page tabloid size daily will be distributed mainly in Amman.

"Other parts of the country will get only a 'sample' of our work before we increase it," he said.

Madaeen said that future plans included increasing the number of pages to 32, in addition to increasing the material used, especially features, researches and studies.

According to Basim Sakjha, Al Massaiya's chief editor, the JD500,000 capital paper is editorially independent.

It is fully owned by the National House for Press and Publications company. The company is one of

many publishing companies in Jordan, it has shares in Al Arab Al Yawm and Shihaan weekly.

"By publishing late in the afternoon, after 2 p.m. we benefit from the time difference with the United States and many other foreign countries," Sakjha said earlier, explaining how other dailies start printing from page 4 at 9 p.m. at night, giving the evening paper the advantage of carrying updated news.

This is the second attempt by Sakjha and Madaeen for an evening daily in the Kingdom. The first one under the name of "Akher Khabar," folded in 1990 after one year in circulation.

With less than one week in circulation, initial reaction to the paper is still mixed. Some journalists said they did not see the newspaper offering any different news or views.

Others said five dailies were more than enough in the Kingdom, as they all seem to write exactly the same news, therefore the new daily was not expected to add much.

One, however, said he thought the evening daily was needed especially if it provides the reader with updated economic news from Southeast Asia.

News in Brief

Team probing JPMC fire to submit findings Sunday

AMMAN (Petra) — An investigation committee looking into reasons behind a recent fire at the Jordan Phosphate Mines Company in the Red Sea port city of Aqaba, is expected to submit its findings on Sunday, a company official said. Hani Dakhan, head of a JPMC industrial complex, told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, that Thursday's fire caused "some minor material losses" but did not harm the company's overall productivity. He said teams were working round-the-clock to repair the line that carries sulphur which was damaged during the incident. Repairs will be completed within the next three days, he said. According to Dakhan, around 10,000 tonnes of the sulphur, used for producing chemical fertilisers, are available in the JPMC's warehouses — enough for 10 days of processing.

Royal Wings increases flights to Aqaba, other destinations

AMMAN (Petra) — Royal Wings, a subsidiary of Royal Jordanian, said Saturday it would launch 14 weekly flights to Aqaba, eight to Tel-Aviv, six to Gaza and two to Haifa under its 1999 plan of action. Royal Wings Director General Ahmed Qantar said the airline, covering regional airports, was expected to carry 46,707 passengers to Aqaba, 32,156 to Tel Aviv, 16,640 to Gaza and 4,680 to Haifa next year. He said the two-year-old company would also launch 370 flights to the Egyptian sea resorts of Hurgada and Sharm El Sheikh, to the Greek island of Rhodes and to Turkey and Cyprus. Qantar said a regular service linking Jordan and several popular Egyptian resorts was expected to be launched in the second half of next year after Egyptian authorities grant official approval to the airline. Over the past two years, Royal Wings has carried 142,499 passengers on its two 50-seat Canadian-made aircraft.

Wet weather to improve Sunday

AMMAN (Petra) — The weather will be partly cloudy with scattered showers in the northern and middle parts of the Kingdom, Meteorology Department sources said Saturday. They said temperatures would start rising Sunday and winds will be easterly moderate.

Seminar slams Arab media for failing to promote human rights

AMMAN (J.T.) — A seminar looking into the role of the local media in promoting human rights across the Arab World has concluded that most newspapers and state-run television and radio have failed to build popular awareness regarding the sensitive issue.

The one-day seminar, organised by the Amman-based Arab Media Institute, called on local media to live up to people's expectations when tackling human rights guaranteed by respective constitutions and by international laws.

Jordanian deputies, journalists and human rights activists who took part in

Wednesday's one-day seminar agreed that the Jordanian media had generally failed in defining human rights to the 4.2 million population.

The absence of democracy in most Arab countries prevented the media from playing its role as an independent watchdog over the government and denied the people the chance to express their views freely, they added.

This, they said, contributed to factors preventing a proper building of popular human rights awareness campaigns and any reporting of alleged abuses.

They said, however, that newspapers focused more than television and radio on human rights issues because the latter ones were state-run.

Local newspapers have shown reluctance in covering activities organised by human rights organisations, let alone their protests in case of human rights violations.

"It is very difficult to debate human rights in the Arab World because human rights are violated in all Arab countries," charged deputy Mahmoud Kharabshah.

"And the media in the Arab World is controlled by

governments which steer it according to their orientation," added the lawmaker who is a member of the House's Legal Committee.

"Television and radio in Jordan have no role in defending human rights simply because both are owned by the government," said Kharabshah.

He also blasted human rights organisations saying they only focused on Amman, ignoring other parts of the Kingdom where other forms of human rights violations, including poverty and unemployment, are rampant.

Court of Cassation overturns death sentence

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — The Court of Cassation has overturned a Criminal Court ruling sentencing a 22-year-old man to death after convicting him of murdering a six-year-old relative in Jerash in March, judicial sources said on Saturday.

The decision was made on Thursday.

The sources said the Criminal Court will either retry Ahmad Mohammad for murdering Bara' Mohammad in the Souf

Refugee Camp near Jerash to avenge his mother's alleged problems with her in-laws, or will uphold its two-month-old decision.

The higher court, which returned the file to the Criminal Court for a retrial, asked it to consider the defendant's mental condition "during the time the murder was committed."

Mohammad's defence attorney asked the Criminal Court during the October trial to refer his client to a mental institute

for examination "but the court then refused."

"The Criminal Court was supposed to consider the attorney's request to refer the defendant for mental examination before deciding whether to try him or not," the Court of Cassation ruled.

According to court documents, Mohammad's mother was being treated for mental illness and "the convict believed that the family of his brother-in-law were behind her troubles."

"Mohammad plotted to kill a member of his brother-in-law family in revenge," the court stated.

On the morning of the incident, Mohammad met with the child in the camp and "took her to his house."

"He choked the girl, stabbed her with a knife, smashed her skull with a brick, placed her body in a plastic bag and buried her in the backyard of his house," the court said.

FILM

...the French Club... on Monday Dec. 28, 7:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

...of ceramics.

What's going on

sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Ham-mourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098).

until Jan. 25.

* Exhibition of Nabataean silver jewelry at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre, off Wadi Sagra Street, until Jan. 15 (Tel. 5699141/2).

* "The Warm Winter" — works by several artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1.

* The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2, until Jan. 28).

Top Khmer Rouge leaders quit jungle, join government

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — The top ideologue of Cambodia's genocidal Khmer Rouge, Nuon Chea, and nominal leader Khieu Samphan have given up their jungle-bound rebel life to join the government, officials announced Saturday.

After discussions with Prime Minister Hun Sen the pair split from Ta Mok, the brutal military chief of the group. Friday and moved to the western town and former rebel stronghold of Pailin, according to deputy cabinet chief Muth Khieu and deputy chief of staff Meas Sophea.

A senior government source, requesting anonymity, told AFP the pair was due to visit the capital Tuesday. However, officials refused to reveal details of the deal struck between them and Phnom Penh.

In a series of hand-written letters to Hun Sen — obtained by AFP early Saturday — Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan asked to be allowed to defect and "strengthen peace and stability, national reconciliation and the development of Cambodia."

Along with Ta Mok, Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan played leading roles under late supreme Pol Pot during the Khmer Rouge's 1975-1979 regime, when as many as two million Cambodians died.

The two are likely to stand trial in a proposed international tribunal for Khmer

Rouge crimes against humanity, awaiting a go-ahead from United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan.

But in return for their pledge of allegiance, they are unlikely to face any criminal proceedings inside Cambodia.

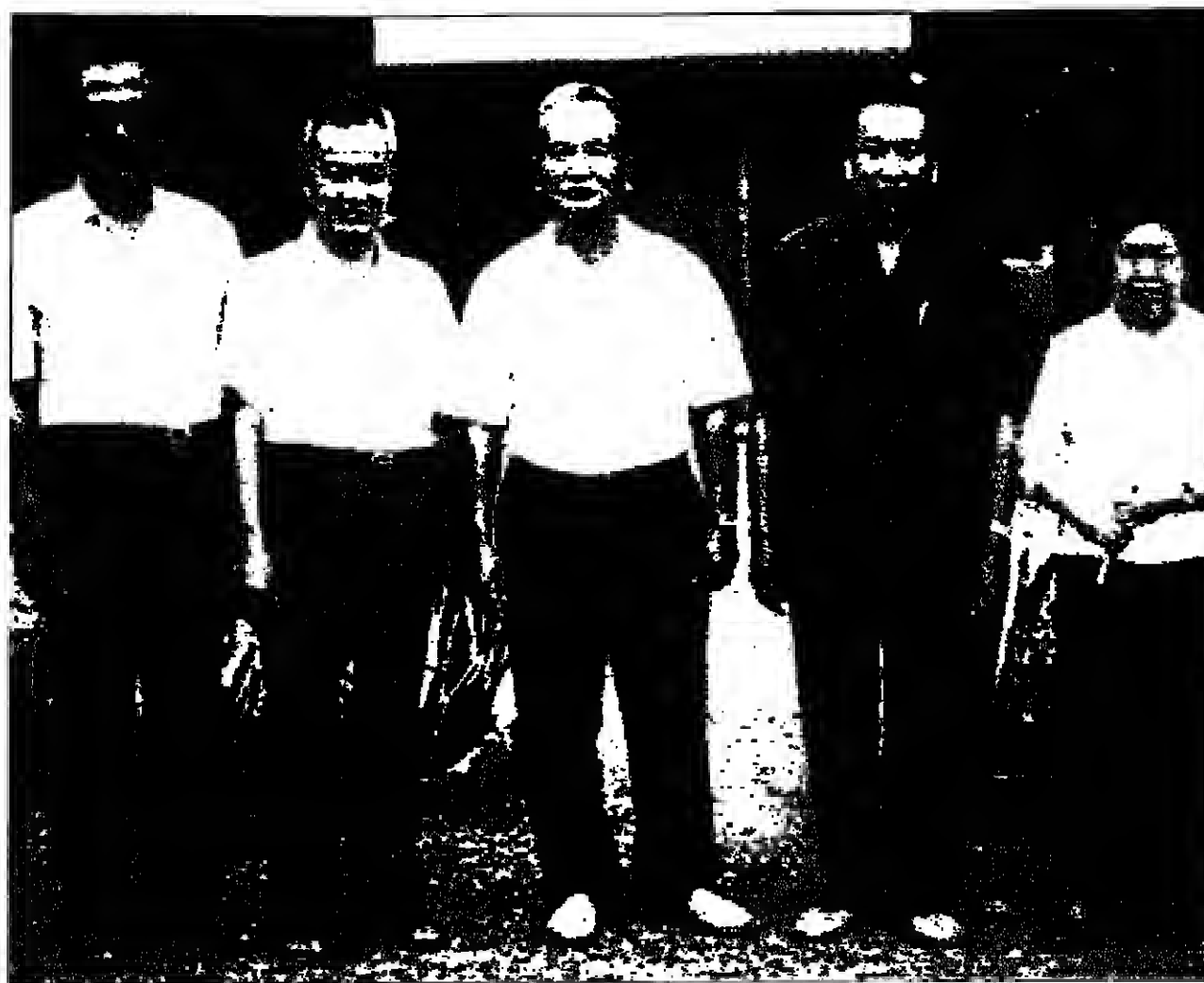
Nuon Chea wrote: "I respect and recognise the constitution of Cambodia, respect and recognise the royal government of Cambodia with Hun Sen as prime minister and support the political platform of the government, and support the supreme role of the king."

"That is why I wish the royal government to give concessions and permit my only request to return to society and live as a normal citizen," the 71-year-old added in the bid to end his fugitive jungle life.

Khieu Samphan's three-page letter came after a Christmas Day telephone conversation with Hun Sen, and requested that the premier pass on the defection request to King Norodom Sihanouk.

"As I had told your excellency through (the) telephone, my request is to return and live as a simple citizen," Khieu Samphan, 67, wrote.

In a written response Hun Sen — himself a one-time Khmer Rouge field commander — welcomed the pair to the government fold, and said their determination and actions had shown their



Two of the top remaining Khmer Rouge guerrilla leaders, Khieu Samphan (second left) and Nuon Chea (third left), shown in this January 1986 file photo, have surrendered to the Cambodian government saying they want to live as "normal citizens," the Cambodian government said Dec. 26. Pictured in this file photo taken at a camp in Western Cambodia are Khmer Rouge leaders (from left) Son Sen, Khmer Rouge Defence Minister; Khieu Samphan, nominal leader of the Khmer Rouge; Nuon Chea, former Khmer Rouge party deputy secretary; the late Pol Pot and Yan Yath, wife of Son Sen (Reuters photo)

"great willingness to end the war, find peace and reconciliation and end the national division."

The ailing King Sihanouk, briefly a head of state for Pol Pot and currently undergoing medical treatment in China, had given his stamp of approval to the defection, officials added.

Nothing has been revealed about the exact whereabouts of Ta Mok, now the only Khmer Rouge leader still at

large and believed to be isolated with just a few bodyguards along the Thai-Cambodian border.

In Pailin the defection duo will join Ieng Sary, the group's former number three and Pol Pot's foreign minister who switched sides in 1996, a step that set in motion the disintegration of the Khmer Rouge through a process of splits, defections and military defeats.

On Dec. 5 the last of the

group's main guerrilla force defected to government ranks.

Much of Phnom Penh's control over the isolated west and north of the country depends on former Khmer Rouge support, while the coalition government and military are permeated by both officials and victims of the group as part of Cambodia's attempts at national reconciliation.

The Khmer Rouge's brutal implementation of agrarian collectivism transformed Cambodia into a vast killing field, wiping out up to two million people through torture, execution, overwork or starvation.

The ultra-Maoist group led by Pol Pot, who died in a jungle camp in April, was driven from power after Vietnam invaded Cambodia in late 1978. None of its leaders has yet been brought to justice.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Philippine leader sees less kidnappings in the south next year

MANILA (AFP) — President Joseph Estrada said Saturday he was hopeful that kidnappings for ransom in the southern Philippines would decline following the death of a Muslim extremist leader. Estrada said the killing in a gun battle last week of Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, head of the extremist Abu Sayyaf group, was likely to leave its members in disarray. "I am sure the trend of kidnappings will decline," he said in a radio interview. Estrada said Janjalani was "notorious, being the number one mastermind of kidnappings." The country's most wanted man, with a 1.5-million-peso (\$38,000) bounty on his head, was killed in a clash with police in southern Basilan island Dec. 18. The Abu Sayyaf has been blamed for the kidnapping of several foreigners in the southern region of Mindanao, including two Hong Kong Chinese and a Malaysian released last week after 106 days of captivity. Officials publicly said no ransom was paid but military sources said up to 10 million pesos (\$256,000) was paid. Several armed groups operate in Mindanao, aside from the Abu Sayyaf and they have also been accused of turning kidnapping into a lucrative industry. These groups include the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), former secessionist guerrillas turned handouts and security escorts of rival political clans.

Russian hostage freed in exchange for Chechen prisoner

MOSCOW (AP) — A Russian policeman held hostage in Chechnya was released Saturday in exchange for a Chechen prisoner being held in Russia, a news report said. Sergei Khalansky, a 41-year-old police inspector in the southern Russian town of Grazhdanskoye, was kidnapped June 9 and taken to the breakaway Chechnya region, the ITAR-TASS news agency said. Khalansky's abductors demanded a large ransom, but in a deal worked out by Alexander Lebed, Khalansky was exchanged for a Chechen prisoner being held in Russia. No details were given about the Chechen prisoner, Lebed, a retired general who negotiated the end to Chechnya's 1994-96 independence war with Russia, has helped in the release of Russian hostages. He is considered a top contender for Russia's 2000 presidential elections. Hostage-taking for ransom has become a booming business in Chechnya, a small Caucasus region awash in violence and crime since the end of the war. More than a hundred Russian and foreign hostages are believed to still be held there.

40,000 Chinese families still without homes after summer flooding

BEIJING (AFP) — Almost 40,000 families who lost everything in China's disastrous summer flooding remain homeless in the northeastern province of Jilin. Xinhua reported Saturday. Only 46,000 of the 85,800 families who lost their homes have been rehoused so far, the official news agency said. Jilin was hit hard by summer flooding this year, with direct losses in the eight worst-affected counties and cities amounting to 45 million dollars. The World Food Programme (WFP) is still providing emergency aid to 5.8 million victims of China's devastating summer floods. The Paris-based aid group Medecins Sans Frontières said a month ago that some 200,000 Chinese flood victims were still living on dykes and at risk from epidemics and the approaching winter. Official figures show the summer floods, the worst to hit the country since 1954, left 3.656 dead, mainly in the Yangtze River valley. The floods affected 223 million people, a fifth of China's population, in 29 provinces along the Yangtze River and the northeast.

U.K. protesters to track hunters with hounds

LONDON (AFP) — Police in Surrey, southwestern England, said Saturday they were bracing for an invasion by several thousand hunting opponents protesting traditional hunting with hounds. "Boxing Day," the day after Christmas, typically sees British gentry turn out to track fox, deer and hares. There are an estimated 350,000 hound hunters in Britain, including Prince Charles and other royals. This year, police say some 300 hunts with hounds were expected, along with corresponding groups of protesters. Animal rights activists condemn the hunts, which consist of running prey, often a fox, down with a pack of hounds as hunters follow on horseback. The dogs often end by running the prey to exhaustion and then ripping it apart. "We try to liaise with both the hunt supporters and the protesters to ensure that everything passes off peacefully," said Chief Inspector David Bosden of Surrey. "But of course we are aware that there is more of a potential for trouble on this particular day," he added. The animal rights group Protect Our Wild Animals also plans to rally in front of Prime Minister Tony Blair's country residence at Chequers. They blame Blair for not making good on a campaign promise to ban the practice. But a proposed law put forward by Labour deputy Mike Foster was shelved in July by conservative deputies in favour of what they consider a sport. Some 250,000 hunters on May 1 rallied in London to show support for the tradition, and to kill the bill. However, a recent poll for the International Fund for Animal Welfare indicated that 66 per cent of the British opposed the hunts.

Founder of China's nuclear programme dies

BEIJING (AP) — Wang Ganchang, the scientist credited with founding China's atomic bomb programme, has died of an unspecified illness in Beijing, state-run media reported Saturday. He was 90. The state-run Xinhua News Agency reported that Wang died Dec. 10 and was cremated Friday at Beijing's Babaoshan cemetery, the final resting place of many of China's revolutionary heroes. A native of eastern Jiangsu province, Wang was graduated from elite Tsinghua University in 1929 and earned a doctorate from Berlin University in 1933. Returning to China the following year, he helped establish China's nuclear research programme. Wang worked as a research scientist at the University of California at Berkeley after World War II, ended in 1945. He returned to China just before the Communists took power in October 1949. Working at a government-run academy, Wang oversaw the design and manufacture of China's first atomic bomb. A front-page report in Saturday's People's Daily, the newspaper of the Communist Party, lauded Wang as the "founding father" of China's nuclear weapons programme and noted that President Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji, among many others, had sent condolences upon hearing of his illness and death. "Wang Ganchang was an outstanding representative among our nation's scientists. His passing is a great loss to atomic research in our country and the world," it said.

East Timor bishop reluctant to meet Indonesian president

JAKARTA (AFP) — East Timor Bishop Carlos Ximenes Felipe Belo has rejected an invitation from Indonesia's President B.J. Habibie to meet in the New Year, a report said Saturday. The Kompas daily quoted the Nobel peace laureate as saying there was no need to meet the president until Jakarta put into effect 13 measures which he had suggested for the troubled territory during a June meeting with Habibie.

"Had the 13 points been realised in East Timor, I would have gone to Jakarta and given an evaluation of their implementation," Belo said at his residence in the East Timor capital Dili.

Habibie said Thursday he wanted to meet Belo and another East Timor bishop after the New Year to evaluate the outcome of an agreement between him and Belo during their first talks in June and to address possible new problems.

But Belo questioned the value of a new meeting, saying it was the job of East Timor Governor Abilio Jose Osorio Soares to discuss with Habibie the situation in the former Portuguese colony.

"Governor Abilio all this time has been going back and forth between Dili and Jakarta. Was there no time to report the situation in

East Timor to President Habibie?" Belo asked.

Among the 13 points Belo suggested to help settle the East Timor problem were a gradual withdrawal of Indonesian troops, a referendum on self-determination, the teaching of the local Tetum language and Portuguese in schools and a requirement for migrants to have a job or skills before coming to the territory.

The bishop's meeting with Habibie on June 24 came a month after the resignation of former president Suharto, who ordered the military invasion of East Timor in 1975 and its annexation the following year.

At the June meeting Habibie offered wide-ranging autonomy for East Timor, which the United Nations and most states still view as officially administered by Portugal.

The proposal is currently being negotiated by Indonesia and Portugal in talks held under the auspices of the U.N. secretary general in New York.

Habibie also promised the gradual withdrawal of troops from East Timor but ruled out a referendum on self-determination.

Jailed East Timorese rebel leader Xanana Gusmao has said autonomy should be conditional on a promise for the referendum to be held

after 10 years.

Calls for the release of Xanana, who is serving a 20-year jail term for plotting against the state and illegal possession of weapons, have been made by Belo, many foreign governments and by the U.N. special envoy on East Timor, James H. D. Mark. who ended a nine-day visit here Wednesday.

They said Gusmao should be freed because his "strategic position" could benefit the talks.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas Tuesday said negotiations were "progressing step by step" but admitted that it was difficult to predict when the tripartite dialogue would result in agreement.

Among the tough issues to be settled are that of a referendum. The Indonesian government maintains that autonomy should be the final solution while many sides want some form of self-determination.

Jakarta last week named two diplomats to be assigned to the Indonesian interests section in Lisbon, scheduled to open in January along with a Portuguese interests section in Jakarta.

It was the first thaw in diplomatic relations severed by Portugal after the 1975 invasion.

Taiwan firm sends team to probe Cambodia waste

TAIPEI (R) — Taiwan's Formosa Plastics Corp said Saturday it would send a team including environmental experts and lawyers to Cambodia to try to resolve a row over mercury-tainted industrial waste dumped there.

"The company has decided to immediately form a team to go to Cambodia to launch an inquiry and handle the case," Taiwan petrochemical giant Formosa Plastics said in a brief statement.

"We hope to effectively resolve the matter as soon as possible," the statement said.

Formosa stopped short of saying whether it would take back the 3,000 tonnes of waste as demanded by Phnom Penh.

Cambodia has threatened to sue Formosa to compensate for the damage the waste had inflicted at Sihanoukville, where the waste turned up in early December.

"We hope to end the trouble brought to the Cambodian government and the residents as soon as possible and to prevent misunder-

standing from hurting the international reputation of our country and the company," Formosa said.

It said the team would include a lawyer who has had close links with Cambodian authorities, foreign experts, lawyers, and environmental specialists.

It did not say when the team would leave for Cambodia.

A Japanese expert said Friday preliminary tests on the industrial waste showed a "very high" and potentially dangerous concentration of mercury.

Cambodia's Environment Ministry's Pollution Control Department made available a copy of a facsimile from Singaporean testing laboratory Matcor Technology & Services, which said analysis of a sample showed a mercury concentration of 675 parts per million.

Formosa has said the cement-like material is tainted with mercury but has been certified by the Environmental Protection Administration as safe

for landfill disposal.

News of the waste sparked riots in the southern Cambodian port of Sihanoukville last weekend in which one person was killed as protesters sacked offices of officials they blamed for allowing its import.

Four more died in a panicked exodus of more than 10,000 people fearing contamination, while the Health Ministry has said the deaths of at least two residents appeared linked to unprotected movement of the waste.

Taiwan environmentalists fetched some samples of the waste from Cambodia Friday to provide to independent experts, Formosa and Taiwan's government for examination. The Environmental Protection Administration said the result would be available within days.

Taipei, which does not have formal ties with Phnom Penh, has urged the Cambodian government to launch a full inquiry before appointing blame. Cambodia recognises only Taiwan's arch rival, China.

Cubans celebrate Christmas wary of Santa Claus

HAVANA (AFP) — Free to celebrate Christmas once again after a 30-year moratorium, Cubans have mixed feelings about the role of Santa Claus in a holiday which they are largely unfamiliar with.

Jolly Saint Nick is being criticised on the island by both Roman Catholic clerics and Communist stalwarts for personifying consumerism and unwanted foreign ideology.

In a 15-minute Christmas Day radio message to the Cuban people, Cardinal Jaime

Ortega prayed for peace and reconciliation — and took a swipe at the puffed fellow in the red suit.

Ortega said he hoped the "commercial attraction of an imported Santa Claus" will not become the core of the holiday, but rather the faith the people have in their religion and the "joy of the heart."

Hard-line Communist militants go even further, stating that Santa Claus is really an agent of U.S. cultural imperialism.

Images of Santa and

"Merry Christmas" banners decorate foreign currency stores, but little such holiday paraphernalia can be found in the peso stores.

This is a "deplorable ideological confusion," lamented the pro-government daily La Tribuna.

"Is there no true Cuban way to celebrate Christmas?" asked the workers' weekly Trabajadores, which lashed out at this "mental colonisation."

The official Communist Party newspaper Friday made no

mention of the holiday.

Cubans may be mystified about the controversy: after all, no Cuban under 28 has witnessed a public celebration of the festival on the island before, and many are unsure how to celebrate the key date in the Catholic Church's year.

Christmas was wiped off the official calendar in 1970, when the Communist government of President Fidel Castro declared it interfered with Cuba's sugar harvest.

Although there was no law banning Christmas

celebrations in the intervening 30 years, observance was socially taboo.

Cubans did get a taste of Christmas last year when Castro declared Dec. 25, 1997 a holiday as an "exceptional" measure in view of Pope John Paul II's visit to the island in January.

Today, "the need to mobilise hundreds of thousands of workers in December to cut by hand all the sugar cane no longer exists. Cutters and machines do much of the harvesting," the politburo of the Cuban

Communist Party said commenting on the decision to encourage celebration of the event.

Ortega acknowledged in his Christmas homily that it will be a challenge for the local Catholic Church to help Cubans refamiliarise themselves with the occasion.

"Among many of our brethren, there is a still a certain reluctance to celebrate the festival," Ortega said. "But we should wish everyone we meet, in the street, at home, a happy Christmas."



Video image from Sky TV shows British Virgin tycoon Richard Branson as he talks to the media after his attempt to become the first to circumnavigate the world in a balloon came to an end off Oahu, Dec. 25 (Reuters)

Unexpected present for Branson — a bath

LONDON (R) — British tycoon Richard Branson's dream of a round-the-world balloon record may be shattered by Saturday as he was forced to get an unexpected Christmas present — a good soak in the bath.

"Right now I'm just delighted to be alive and to have had a nice long bath," Branson told BBC radio in an interview from Hawaii.

"We had a most magnificent adventure for seven wonderful days," he said, looking back on the high-flying venture that had to be aborted Friday because the hot air balloon couldn't get out of a troublesome low pressure area over the Pacific.

"Balloonists is a battle against the elements. If the wind doesn't want to go where you want to go, then you don't go and there is no way of steering around it."

Asked whether he would have another shot at becoming the first balloonist to fly non-stop around the world, Branson said: "I'm honestly not sure today. Normally after these trips my most immediate reaction is never again and I suspect that's what it should be but it's just too soon to decide really."

Branson and his two co-pilots

— American Steve Fossett and Swede Per Lindstrand — were plucked from the sea off Hawaii Friday after they aborted their round-the-world bid.

Two U.S. Coast Guard helicopters winched the trio to safety after they jumped into the water from their capsule, which was dragged bouncing across rough seas for a couple of miles by the giant balloon.

All three were unhurt but Branson said that when the capsule failed to separate from the balloon when they ditched into the Pacific, they had been "holding on for dear life."

"Obviously we are disappointed about not making it when we had it in our grasp," Branson said after arriving at a Coast Guard station on Hawaii's Oahu island.

Lindstrand said: "We were so close. Another three days and we would have made it."

The balloon, which took off from Morocco on Dec. 18, had travelled some 13,120 km — about half the distance of its intended journey — when Branson decided to abandon the record bid.

Branson, head of the Virgin Group business empire, said the low pressure trough was "like a

solid brick wall."

East winds taking the balloon to the U.S. coast turned south, and with no way through and only four or five days' fuel left, the trio were forced to abandon their flight and head for the safety of Hawaii.

Crossing the world's biggest ocean was always going to be the most dangerous and daunting hurdle for Branson and his colleagues. But until then, the biggest headaches had been political.

Over China Tuesday, the balloon drifted off an agreed course. Beijing ordered the balloon to land but after the intervention of British Prime Minister Tony Blair and others, the Chinese relented and allowed the balloon to float on.

It then managed to avoid North Korea, which had refused permission to enter its airspace. Branson was forced to alter his original flight path to avoid U.S. and British bombing strikes on Iraq. The team also had to negotiate a narrow corridor between Russia and Iran, both of which refused use of their airspace.

The bid was the latest of almost 20 attempts at the round-the-world record.

Aung San Suu Kyi warns of explosion if NLD banned

YANGON (AFP) — Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has warned the military government that her National League for Democracy (NLD) will continue to operate even if it is eventually banned.

In a transcript of an NLD meeting this week released here, Aung San Suu Kyi warned of the consequences if the government ends its current campaign against the party by banning it.

"If officialdom bans the NLD or deregisters the NLD we will continue to work from this very same office," said Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel peace prize winner.

"We have been trying to prevent an explosion, we are not trying to bring up an explosion," she said.

"For this purpose the NLD chairman has been writing letters to the chairman of the SPDC (government)."

The statement came amid rumours circulating here that the government may deport Aung San Suu Kyi early next year, possibly just before the 52nd anniversary of independence on Jan. 4.

NLD officials made no comment on the rumours Sunday but in her statement Aung San Suu Kyi rejected the idea.

"The only way for the government to deport me is to have a give-and-take deal with a totalitarian state."

"I have no intention at all of leaving this country. If they want to deport me they have to find me a country," she said.

"Which country will accept me? They are accusing me of being a British citizen. That is not true. I have a clear conscience."

Analysis says it is unlikely any other country will accept Aung San Suu Kyi against her will, making it very difficult for the government to deport her.

Others point out that she may

be able to do more damage to the junta from outside the country with access to foreign media organisations, than in her strictly monitored compound in Yangon.

Myanmar's junta has in recent months detained hundreds of NLD activists, many of whom have left the party immediately on their release, proof the NLD says of coercion by military intelligence.

The party disputes government announcements over the number of activists leaving the party, saying many of those purportedly resigning were not NLD members in the first place.

The NLD won a landslide victory in elections in Myanmar in 1990 but the military has refused to hand over power.

Diplomats in Yangon say the government campaign against the NLD is an attempt to crush the party's ability to function as an effective opposition.

China warns Japan's attitude on history will affect ties

BEIJING (AFP) — China Sunday gave its clearest warning yet to Japan to fully recognise its brutal war history in China or face deteriorating ties between Beijing and Tokyo.

"It is not merely a matter of how to interpret history correctly but also an issue of principle in Sino-Japanese relations," the official Xinhua news agency said in a commentary on a recent Japanese court ruling over the 1939 Nanjing massacre.

"If this is allowed to continue, such a basis will weaken the political basis for Sino-Japanese relations," it added.

Last week, the Tokyo High Court upheld a lower court ruling for damages for an 83-year-old former soldier who was described as torturing Chinese in a former comrade's diaries of the Nanjing massacre.

The 83-year-old sued after the diaries said he had "forced" Chinese into a bag, kicked it and set it alight, and the high court ruled that the allegation was unsubstantiated and unlikely in the circumstances.

China says 20 million people died during and after the 1937-45 war with Japan. The allied trials of Japanese war criminals put the figure for the Nanjing

massacre alone at 140,000.

But Japan has offered no figure and gives its school children a very sketchy history of their past while extreme rightists in the country — who held vocal protests during the recent visit of Chinese President Jiang Zemin — deny that the Nanjing massacre even took place.

Jiang's visit to Japan in November was aimed at putting relations between the two neighbours onto a new footing for the next century, but ties were firmly dragged back into the past, with Japan refusing to offer a full, written apology for its wartime atrocities.

Serb killed, forces partially withdraw in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia (AFP) — Kosovo fell relatively quiet Saturday as Serbs withdrew part of their forces from the embattled province after a two-day military campaign.

The Serbian Information Centre in the provincial capital Pristina reported one Serb, Milovan Radojevic, 65, was killed by ethnic Albanian guerrillas in the village of Obandza near the northern town of Podujevo.

International peace monitors reported a partial withdrawal of troops. The area around Podujevo was the scene of a Serb crackdown on the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) last week, following a spate of killings that had threatened October's fragile ceasefire.

There were no reports of clashes between Serb forces

and the KLA Saturday and Joergen Grunet, spokesman for the OSCE international peace monitors here said the situation appeared calm.

He said that some Serb forces with tanks had pulled out of an airbase at Ballava near Podujevo.

Some Serb forces had remained in place at the airport, he added.

Serb troops and police launched a major operation on Thursday against a KLA stronghold in the village of Lapastic, around 12 kilometres southeast of Podujevo.

The KLA renounced its ceasefire Thursday, after Serb forces launched operations against rebel bases following a spate of killings in recent weeks, including the slaying of a Serb policeman last week.

Local Serbian police spokesman Bozidar Filic described Lapastic as a stronghold surrounded by bunkers and trenches, the official Tanjug agency said.

He said the rebels had been pushed back to Vucim, 25 kilometres to the west, but journalists on the scene Friday said the KLA were still entrenched in the village.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which had ten monitoring teams in the region Friday, said the Serb offensive included around 40 tanks and armoured vehicles.

Eight KLA guerrillas died in the fighting, Kosovo sources said, while the Yugoslav army reported that two of its soldiers were injured.

The military operation

against the KLA was the largest since Serb troops withdrew to their bases following a mid-October ceasefire brokered by U.S. envoy Richard Holbrooke with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

The international community had threatened Belgrade with air strikes if it did not halt its eight-month crackdown on ethnic Albanians, who make up 90 per cent of the province's population.

Podujevo, a city of 20,000 mostly ethnic Albanian inhabitants, is a strategic town on the main road linking Kosovo to Serbia.

William Walker, the U.S. diplomat heading the 2,000-strong OSCE observer team, was in the area Saturday accompanied by Dusan Loncar, the president of the

Yugoslav commission for relations with the monitors.

Walker talked to both commanders of the KLA and government forces in several areas, Grunet said.

He added: "We cannot say that he stopped the fire, but since he arrived there was just sporadic shooting."

He also received a group of relatives of Serbs who had been reported missing in Kosovo.

The group had earlier in the week handed him a list of 111 people who had disappeared, most of them in the summer when fighting was at its peak.

Walker said he would examine how the OSCE could help.

"If that means going to a village and looking for their relatives I'll do it," he said.

Japan police finds fourth N. Korean rafter

TOKYO (R) — Japanese police said Saturday the body of a fourth possible North Korean soldier had washed ashore earlier this month.

A partially decomposed body of a man dressed in a military uniform with a red star insignia was found in the Sea of Japan coastal village of Goka on Dec. 16. The place is about 300 km west of where the bodies of three possible North Korean soldiers washed ashore in Japan Friday.

News on the earlier discovery of the fourth body was

reported by local newspapers Saturday after Japanese police announced a day earlier that they have found the three bodies.

"We are not equipped to identify whether the body is that of a North Korean soldier or not," a Shimane Prefecture Police spokesman told Reuters.

The man was dressed in military garb similar to that of the three bodies found Friday, he said.

National police officials were not immediately avail-

able for comment.

In a Christmas day mystery, the decomposed bodies of three possible North Korean soldiers washed up on the shores of central Japan about 800 km west of Tokyo.

Initial media reports said the three may have been crewmen from a North Korean vessel that was sunk on Dec. 18 in an engagement with South Korean patrol boats and planes.

Only one body was recovered after the shoot out, which

took place in South Korean waters off the country's southern coast and involved a mini submarine that normally carries up to eight crew.

But later autopsies showed the men had been dead for one to three months and could not have been part of the submarine mission, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

He said the unarmed men, tied to the raft by rope, were "half skeletal". Their heads were reduced to half-exposed skulls and their feet were bleached bones.

Each man had fishermen's floats tied around his waist. Their raft measured 1.5 metres long and two metres wide.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka told a news conference on Friday that Japan did not have enough details to determine whether the bodies were indeed North Korean soldiers.

Seoul also said Friday the three bodies were unrelated to the North Korean mini submarine that was sunk by South Korean patrol boats and fighter jets.

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Workable formula needed

THE ARAB Parliamentary Union's emergency meeting in Amman today to discuss last week's U.S.-British air strikes against Iraq is a triumph for the Arab parliamentary process in general and Jordan's Parliament in particular. For the APU to hold such an emergency meeting to deal with an urgent Arab issue is a living testimony to the rising importance of the Iraqi dilemma in inter-Arab affairs. Jordanian deputies took the initiative in calling for such a meeting after condemning the four-day aerial and missile attacks on Iraq and calling for the lifting of the U.N.-imposed sanctions on Baghdad.

The importance of Sunday's gathering is reflected by the decision of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, to preside over the oneday deliberations. The significance of the deliberations, though, would lie squarely in its balanced and impassioned approach to the plight of Iraq and its people. To start with, there is near unanimity among Arab parliamentarians that Iraq's bombardment by Washington and London deserves condemnation as illegal since it was carried out without the approval of the U.N. Security Council. Since both major powers have acted unilaterally and without the consent of the council, their actions cannot be deemed to have been carried out in the name of the international community.

In addition, the punitive sanctions against Iraq have lasted for much too long and a new mechanism must be found to replace them with the intention of alleviating the suffering of the Iraqis. While we recognise the need to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and elsewhere in the region, an equitable formula must be adopted that would end the embargo being slammed on Iraq. In this regard, Iraq should be encouraged to cooperate with the United Nations to end the standoff over weapons inspections in accordance with U.N. resolutions.

French President Jacques Chirac has called for the elaboration of such a balanced equation but his ideas were immediately rebuffed by the U.S. Without Washington's consent, the lifting of the sanctions by the council appears doomed. The Arab World would offer Iraq and its people a great service should it endorse the French initiative as a basis for ending Iraq's ordeal. An Arab participation in the international inspection team could be just one idea that APU may wish to explore for that purpose.

Condemnations and denunciations are not enough. What the Arab parliamentarians should focus on is the elaboration of a new formula for relations between Iraq on the one hand, and the Arab World, the West and the U.N. on the other. Such a formula should make an end to the misery of the Iraqi people its top priority.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Fanek said World Bank policies are no longer above being questioned, as these days they are even criticised by the U.S. The writer said he has many unanswered questions regarding World Bank figures. What does "partnership" between the bank and "cooperating" countries mean, and does it include participation in administering these countries? Why have some countries of Southeast Asia, implementing these policies and those of the International Monetary Fund, undergone a financial crisis, and why did the two international bodies fail in "predicting" this? asked Fanek. Was the drop in international oil prices a result of free market factors or industrial countries' policies? Is the bank responsible for failure of economic growth, and why does the international funding body "impose" loans with high interests on the private sectors of developing countries? the writer asked.

Al Ra'i's Fahri Kavar said the Lower House of Parliament's recent stand regarding lifting the embargo on Iraq was vastly different to the government position. However, the writer said, Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh's recent statements were "satisfactory." Kavar quoted Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as saying that the Arab Nation has to take a unified stand to support Iraq and lift the sanctions. The Parliament's call for holding an emergency Arab summit, in fact, a green light to go ahead and lift the embargo, Kavar said.

Economic recovery around the corner

WHILE IT is too early to speculate about the final figures of Jordan's economic performance for 1998, it is very likely that this year could prove to be the worst since 1988, when the financial crisis erupted causing the Kingdom to default on its foreign debt, and devaluation of the dinar.

During the past three years it was evident that the economic situation may deteriorate further before it starts to improve. In fact, it did deteriorate, and the economy may reach its lowest point in 1998. Finally, now could be the time for the drop in economic activity to level off and resume rising again.

There are strong signals that the Jordanian economy is about to begin a new phase of recovery, perhaps slowly but steadily. When share prices in the Amman

Financial Market began to fall in 1994, it was an early warning of an impending economic recession.

Speculators in the market foresaw what was coming around the corner and acted accordingly. Now that share prices have levelled off, and began to rise since early November, one may read this as the first sign of an imminent overall economic recovery, as well as an indication of optimism in business circles.

Apart from the positive indicators given by the Amman Financial Market, there are scores of other indicators pointing to the beginning of the end of recession. For instance, the successful closing of the privatisation deal of the Jordan Cement Factories Company, which was decisive and timely, secured a substantial amount of money for

the budget, and the balance of payments. This deal lessens the government's need to impose higher taxes, and it enhances the Central Bank of Jordan's foreign exchange reserves.

If the privatisation drive gains momentum, it may become the stepping stone, and the spark, for the long-awaited economic recovery. Other projects in the privatisation pipeline include the Aqaba Railway Corporation, which will inject JD 20 million into the treasury, and \$80 million in new foreign investment for modernisation and expansion, creating many new jobs in the southern region of the country.

Another promising project is the light rail system, connecting the two highly populated centres of Amman and Zarqa. The project

Sunday's Economic Pulse



Dr. Fahed Fanek

could bring in an investment of about \$100 million, which will certainly breathe life into the econo-

my. One should not ignore the activity in the construction sector generated by the building of several new five-star hotels. Very soon, Amman will have two new Holiday Inn, a Movenpick at the Dead Sea, and a Sheraton, a Four Seasons, and a Hyatt in the capital.

The growth in the hotel industry will create thousands of new jobs, attract hundreds of thousands of tourists, and generate a flow of foreign exchange, taking advantage of the special pilgrimage year of 2000.

While everyone is fully aware that the Jordanian economy is currently in a dark tunnel, there now seems to be a light at the end of this tunnel. Therefore, the time is right for serious investors to enter the market aggressively.

Dawn of the euro

By Gwynne Dyer

CAPTAIN EURO, the blue and white lycra-clad cartoon character whose website (www.captaineuro.com) is meant to woo sentimental Europeans away from their unmoded franks, lire and guilders, is a marketing disaster. His militaristic peaked cap resembles those worn by German student duelling societies, and later by the Brownshirts who paved the way for Nazi rule. As if the Deutsche mark were about to take over Europe.

On 1 January, for the first time since the fall of the Roman Empire, Europe from the Mediterranean to the North Sea will have a single currency: the euro. And there are still some - especially in Britain, which is staying out for the moment - who think the whole thing is a plot to foist German control on the rest of Europe.

But those vile Germans won't get away with it so long as Rupert Murdoch's newspapers stand guard over British sovereignty. When the new German finance minister, Oskar Lafontaine, suggested that the next item on the European agenda after a unified currency should be "harmonised" tax policies, Murdoch's flagship tabloid in Britain, The Sun (which has always understood that xenophobia sells as many newspapers as bare breasts) did its Australian/American master proud.

"Listen very carefully, Herr Lafontaine," blared the headline that covered two-thirds of the Sun's front page. "We will say this only once: Foxrot Oskar." The "F" and the "O" were highlighted for those too young to know just which crude English phrase the military slang referred to. It was much uglier than the "Captain Euro" propaganda - but just as patrolling and stupid.

So have Captain Euro and his buxom blonde sidekick, Europa, inadvertently let the truth out? Is the euro really a Humint plot to dominate Europe? The truth is precisely the opposite: the single currency is a French plot to Gulliverise the German giant in the centre of Europe. As Jacques Attali, adviser to France's late President Francois Mitterrand, said after the negotiations that agreed on the single currency: "Maastricht was a long and complex treaty with but one real goal: to get rid of the mark."

The only reason that eleven European countries are getting a single currency next month is that Germany was reunited nine years ago last month. Even before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the old West Germany was the most powerful economy in the European Union. The new, united Germany towers above the rest - and this is GER-

MANY we are talking about, with all the historical baggage that entails. The French plot to kill the mark could not have succeeded without the collaboration of many Germans, including most crucially former Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Like many Germans of his generation, Kohl believed that the integration of Europe is "in reality a question of war or peace in the 21st century," that if Germany were not irrevocably anchored within a broad European union, the vicious old logic of balance-of-power politics would eventually reassert itself. And what could be more irrevocable than a single European currency?

On the day it comes into existence, 'Euroland' will have a population of 290 million people and an 18.4 per cent share of world trade. This is the biggest shift in the world financial order since Richard Nixon floated the U.S. dollar in 1973, it is

happening in the midst of the biggest global financial crisis for the past fifty years - and it is being done primarily for political, not financial reasons.

This raises a couple of urgent questions. Can the change-over be done without triggering a new bout of panic in the foreign exchange markets? And if the euro really does replace all the other major currencies of the industrialised world except the dollar and the yen, what will that do to Europe's economy and the world's?

The initial shock to the world system should be small, because all the currencies that will turn into the euro on the 1st of January have "converged" in a remarkable way over the past couple of years. In mid-1996, the difference between the interest rates on bonds issued by the German and Italian governments was close to 6 per cent; now it has virtually disappeared.

Interest rates are the main issue, for you can only have one official short-term interest rate in any given currency. So the central banks of the countries that will be in the euro zone have encouraged "convergence" - but there has also been a

voice of confidence by the market, for Italy could not sell its bonds at the same interest rate as Germany unless the market truly believed that the Italian lira is now as good as the German mark.

It never used to be, of course, but last May all the currencies heading for the euro looked their exchange rates, so the lira, the franc, the peseta, and the schilling are already, in a sense, fixed fractions of a Deutsche mark. And now the central banks are even changing their interest rates in a lockstep.

"European Monetary Union started today around 2 p.m.," announced Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, a member of the new European Central Bank, referring to the concerted cut to a 3 per cent interest rate carried out on 3 December by ten of the eleven euro-zone countries. "The importance of this move cannot be overstated." And in a sense, he was right.

In their last-ever independent decision on interest rates, the central banks of Germany, France and all the other countries showed that they are committed to a single European currency with a single interest rate regardless of regional differences that might argue for a higher or lower rate. Italy cut only to 3.5 per cent, but will come into line on 1 January. Nobody now doubts their commitment, and no sane speculator is going to take a run at the euro in the first months of its existence.

What remains is the huge job of changing eleven currencies for one, which will ruin the New Year's long weekend for up to one hundred thousand people in the financial sector all around the world.

"People express a certain amount of amazement that its such a big problem," says Graham Bishop, chair of the European Monetary Union committee of the London Investment Banking Association, "but imagine if (supermarkets) were told that food labelling laws changed at mid-

night, and they would have to take all the tins and food off the shelves in every store and re-label them and put them back overnight. Is the same with us, its just the goods we deal in are money."

Nobody can start the change-over early, because until 11.30 a.m. Central European Time on New Year's Eve, nobody will know the exact value of the euro. It will be the same as the ECU (European currency unit), an existing but highly notional unit of accounting currently valued at U.S. \$1.18. But the ECU is based on a basket of European Union currencies which includes three (the British pound, the Greek drachma, and the Danish krona) that are still floating against the locked, euro-bound ones. So the final rate can only be determined on the day.

Then at 12.30 p.m. on 31 December, eleven finance ministers meeting in Brussels will announce that their countries have adopted the euro at the exchange rate calculated by the European Commission's economists, and the race will be on.

Over U.S. \$ 2,000,000,000,000 (\$2 trillion) of European bonds and

This should improve Europe's global competitiveness, but to what extent depends also on the spending and taxation policies of the euro-zone, and that is a contentious area. We have probably seen the first signs of where monetary union is taking Europe politically. In German Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine's recent talk of "harmonising" some tax rates in the euro-zone, and his even more radical remarks about the need to end the unanimity rule in EU decision-making.

Its a simple equation: one currency equals one interest rate equals one government. You can have a loose federal government, with lots of room for individual variations, but you cannot have a single currency and eleven different sovereign governments. This was, after all, the logic at the heart of the Kohl-Mitterand strategy: that monetary union will FORCE political union.

The political status quo is not really credible: Europe is adopting a currency that may become as important as the U.S. dollar, but it has none of the institutions that normally back such a currency except a central bank. No president, no Congress (the European Parliament has very limited powers), and no federal budget worthy of the name. In the long run, the euro will not survive unless the member countries move rapidly towards a true federation.

So things may move faster than people expect on this front once the euro is up and running. Consider, for example, the defiant joint declaration by German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French President Jacques Chirac early this month, after all the uproar in Britain about Lafontaine's comments: "We will campaign for stronger coordination in economic policy, particularly in the framework of the 11 euro-countries, for rapid progress in harmonisation of taxes, and for the formation of a real European social model."

What is a "European social model"? In Lafontaine's formula, it is "harmonised" fiscal, investment and wages policies across the European Union, and Europe-wide macro-economic policies to stimulate growth and create jobs. That requires a much bigger EU budget, and an end to the unanimity rule that lets a single member veto any decision. And if the recalcitrant British, for example, use their existing veto to block such changes, then we will just make them inside the euro-zone where the British aren't present.

After forty years of glacially slow progress towards European integration, the process has shifted into a make-or-break gamble on rapid movement to a federal Europe. It's a gamble with reasonably good odds for success, simply because the cost of letting the euro fall would be so high that the euro-governments must accept any sacrifices necessary to make it succeed.

In the short run, the euro will be a runaway success. It is practically certain to become a second reserve currency alongside the U.S. dollar, which will not only make it rise against other currencies, but will also affect U.S. economic policy. For the first time in half a century, Americans will have to worry about their balance of payments problems (like everybody else does).

Saddam is net beneficiary

Jordanian Perspective



Dr. Musa Keilani

THERE IS now an urgent need to lift sanctions against Iraq since all stockpiles of chemical weapons have been destroyed, Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh said on Thursday following his meeting with Jordan's Upper House of Parliament. This call should not be ignored.

Arab parliamentarians are due to meet in Amman on Sunday to drum up a unified stand with the Iraqi people for ending the embargo, and to urge Arab leaders to hold a summit.

Whichever way we look it, the recent U.S.-British air strikes against Iraq were a wasted exercise if the objective was to force Baghdad into allowing "total and unfettered" access to its programmes to develop weapons of mass destruction. If the strikes, however, did succeed in eliminating those weapons, and Iraq's ability to produce them, then it is high time the U.N. sanctions on that country are lifted. After all, the U.S. and Britain are claiming that the four-day blitz was a massive success in doing what U.N. weapon inspectors failed to do for eight years.

Regardless of what Washington and London might have to say about it, there is little prospect of U.N. inspectors returning to Iraq in the near future. The Iraqi refusal to allow resumed U.N. inspections of its "military" or any other sites, could not have been made any clearer than when senior Iraqi officials declared that UNSCOM is now history.

In addition, it looks extremely unlikely that a fresh round of air attacks could beat Baghdad into submission, regardless of whatever force the U.S. and U.K. might muster in such an operation. By London and Washington's own admission, the number of missiles lobbed at Iraq in four days exceed that of the 1991 Gulf War itself. But the massive explosives and related destruction failed to move the Iraqi government.

If indeed the U.S.-British objective was to tighten the so-called noose around Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, then again we can see only a loosening of that stranglehold. If anything, the military strikes led to unprecedented Arab fury and gave Saddam a new lease of life within Iraq, and outside, as a victim of aggression.

The unprecedented rampage at the U.S. and British diplomatic missions in Damascus, and the massive public rally in Rabat, should both serve as an eye-opener for Washington and London. The U.S. and U.K. either grossly miscalculated the mood on the Arab streets, or simply did not care.

The U.S. and Britain only managed to alienate their friends in the Arab World, as well as fuel Arab nationalism. Notwithstanding the loss of life and material destruction caused by the military action, Iraq was the net beneficiary. Saddam can now boast of a wider base of support in the Arab World, something he could not have done before Dec. 16, the night the Anglo-American strikes were launched.

Beyond the Arab World, the angry Russian reaction to the military strikes against Iraq, and other responses from world capitals, clearly showed that the political, diplomatic and military front that Washington managed to put together for the 1991 Gulf War has crumbled. Even the countries which sent their soldiers to fight the Iraqis have now made it clear that they do not

accept the U.S. justifications for the latest blitz. They may support the theory that Iraq's alleged stocks of weapons of mass destruction should be destroyed, along with Baghdad's ability to produce such weapons in line with U.N. resolutions, but they do not believe that the American-British approach is the right one.

The Arab and Muslims at large are simply unable to comprehend the "indignant and righteous" American insistence on Iraq complying with U.N. demands, while the U.S. not only spares Israel for its blatant refusal to implement similar mandatory decisions of the Security Council, but also extends a protective umbrella to Tel Aviv against international censure.

Indeed, a large majority of Arabs and Muslims believe that the U.S., by virtue of its almost unlimited political, military, economic and moral support for Israel, bears equal responsibility for the deadlock in the Arab-Israeli process. It simply does not make sense to them why the U.S., despite its massive financial support for Israel, is unable to pressure Tel Aviv into respecting international legitimacy and remaining committed to its agreements.

This thinking may not be fully true, given the pattern of Israeli behaviour even with its guardian angel, but the Arabs and Muslims cannot be blamed for arriving at their own conclusions based on what they see taking place on the ground.

Beyond losing another chunk of its credibility in the international arena, Washington, through its belligerent approach to Iraq, has also given further ammunition to the traditional "U.S.-haters" everywhere - as we can see from the demonstrations which rocked Asian and European streets. At this point, these expressions have been limited to largely peaceful protests, but we cannot rule out violent anti-U.S. demonstrations by hard-liners in any part of the Middle East, or elsewhere in the future.

Political arguments aside, let us accept the American and British assertions that the latest military action against Iraq succeeded where UNSCOM failed - in "degrading" Iraq's programmes to develop weapons of mass destruction, as well as the country's ability to produce them. That leaves the U.S. and Britain in a bind. The operative article of U.N. Security Council Resolution 687 stipulates that the oil embargo on Iraq could be lifted if Iraq's stockpiles of mass destruction weapons, and its ability to produce them, were eliminated. If the U.S. and Britain were successful in doing that, then it should follow that the sanctions are lifted. This is the point that Iraq and its sympathisers should focus on, and this was one of the key issues addressed by Tarawneh last week.

Arabs in of 'The A

By Sally Bl

Arabs in of 'The A

Arabs in of 'The A

The single currency: Risky trip to dollar rivalry

By Larry Elliott

TO SAY the least, it has not been an easy birth. There have been times when it looked like a phantom pregnancy, others when this child of France and Germany threatened to be stillborn. But finally gestation is over and the euro is due to come kicking and screaming in the world.

Make no mistake, this is a historic event. Whether enthusiast or sceptic, the birth of the single currency is a big moment for Europe — the biggest since the Marshall Plan laid the foundations for recovery in the aftermath of the World War II.

The single currency has a long lineage. The Romans had one currency in their empire, but later attempts to turn Europe into a united economy by force failed.

Helmut Kohl has succeeded by peaceful means where Napoleon and Hitler did not by conquest. In the scale of its ambition, the euro project is staggering. Put aside the fact that for the first three years of its life the infant euro will be a virtual currency, with notes and coins only available from 2002 onwards.

From day one, the European Central Bank will set a single interest rate for the entire euro-zone and its 11 currencies will be irrevocably fixed. Should some find the going tough, they will no longer have the option to alter borrowing costs or allow their currencies to take the strain.

The \$64,000 question is whether the euro will work. Supporters argue that in an era of global economic forces, only the large and powerful can survive. Mr. Kohl's devotion to the project stems from his belief that "the nation state cannot solve the great problems of the 21st Century."

John Laughland, in his Eurosceptic tome, *The Tainted Source*, concludes: "Faced with declining competitiveness, low growth, mass unemployment, and

sclerotic and often corrupt political structures, European countries are undertaking to reproduce their present systems at supranational level, rather than to reform at home."

What is true is that the euro will cut transaction costs and, more important, eliminate currency risk. Most big firms hedge against exchange-rate fluctuations, but a lot of smaller enterprises find the cost prohibitive. There are those, like the Confederation of British Industry's Adair Turner, who believe the promise of exchange-rate stability outweighs any loss of interest-rate flexibility.

A second possible advantage is that Europe will be able to reap the full benefit of the single market, with greater transparency leading to real gains for consumers. Economies of scale will lead to higher levels of growth.

Third, the experience of the United States suggests that over time the euro will reshape Europe's economic geography. Whereas each European Union member has a presence across the spectrum of industrial products, each country will become reliant on fewer products, in the same way American car production is concentrated in the Great Lakes States.

So if all goes according to plan, monetary union will lay the foundations for the renaissance of Europe's economy after 25 years of under performance, which has seen the EU's growth-rate drop from three per cent a year in the 1970s to 2.8 per cent in the 1980s, and 1.8 per cent in the 1990s.

What is more, Europe will be able to challenge the economic and political hegemony of the United States.

The ECB will ensure low inflation. Monetary stability will be buttressed by the Stability Pact, which, by setting rules for deficits, will give governments the wherewithal to run counter-cyclical fiscal policies. Consumers will benefit from lower prices and the single market will unleash improvements that

will boost the EU growth rate and eat into its unemployment mountain.

That said, monetary union remains a risk. Less evangelical euro supporters admit they would have preferred the single currency to have been limited to a core of congruent economies. But the belief is that national differences can be overcome, and that fast growth among those on the EU periphery are an example of catch-up which will, in the end, bring about broad convergence across the union.

This is a big assumption, for it is clear the monetary policy needed for the Franco-German core is inappropriate for the Republic of Ireland. Suggestions that the single currency is more about politics than economics tend to be met with derision, complete with assertions about the inevitable forces of history.

There are really three risks — one political, one economic, one practical. The political risk is one of legitimacy. The Bundesbank has political legitimacy, so does the Bank of England. People accept the decisions made on monetary policy by these institutions even when they are unpopular.

The ECB has no such legitimacy. It was set up with the express intention of keeping monetary policy divorced from the people. There will be no chance for parliaments to grill the bank's governor, Wim Duisenberg, and board members will sit for only one, fixed term. But what will happen in a country such as Spain — which has very high unemployment — when the ECB decides that conditions across Europe warrant higher rates?

The risk is that the single currency fails because it has been designed for the challenges of a previous era of inflation. Prices are falling across much of Europe, yet the ECB has an inflation target which is worryingly asymmetrical. In Britain, the Bank of England has an inflation target of 2.5 per cent, and has to explain its actions should the

actual rate deviate from that central rate. The ECB has no such safeguard, but is simply required to keep inflation below two per cent. Given that inflation is set to stay low, this is plain daft.

Recent wrangling about tax harmonisation misses the point. What the new breed of left-leaning finance ministers should be concentrating on is not standardising taxation, but reforming ECB statutes and ensuring fiscal and monetary policy work in tandem.

The deflationary bias of the ECB could lead to poor growth and impotence among politicians. To limit electoral fallout governments might then take off the fiscal brakes, pushing up public spending. The ECB might respond by keeping rates higher, leaving Europe with a combination of tight monetary and loose fiscal policy — the opposite of what it needs.

The practical problem is how to prevent the euro from becoming too strong too early. Europe is running a healthy current account surplus and being touted as a rival reserve to the dollar. There will almost certainly be some rebalancing of portfolios internationally, and this will have the effect of weakening a U.S. currency that already looks vulnerable. A strong euro would be good for the credibility of the ECB, but disastrous for growth.

These risks cannot be wished away. Denis Healey, an impeccable Europhile, believes the euro will collapse in a year. That is pushing it, but hopes that Europe would remain untouched by the global slowdown now look a bit forlorn. On January 1, the euro will be a bonny, baby, but its childhood may prove difficult.

— The Guardian

A brief history of the union

1950: Robert Schuman's plan, proposing creation of European Coal and Steel Community involving France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries

1951: Treaty of Paris, creating ECSC, signed

1957: The six sign the Treaty of Paris, setting up the European Economic Community

1958: Treaty of Paris comes into force, European Commission established

1960: European Free Trade Association agreement, involving Britain, Switzerland, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal and Sweden.

1963: De Gaulle, right, vetoes Britain's membership of the EC, saying: "Non, non et non."

1964: Euro six set up committee of central bank governors

1965: De Gaulle sparks the "empty chair crisis" over opposition to majority voting

1966: The Luxembourg compromise effectively establishes the right of veto

1968: Completion of customs union

1969: Werner report outlines three-point blueprint for economic and monetary union.

1972: Paris summit sets 1980 target date for economic and monetary union

1972: European currency "snake" — an attempt to reduce currency volatility while retaining some flexibility.

1973: Oil price shock sinks Werner report approach to economic and monetary union

1975: Referendum endorses British membership of EEC

1979: European monetary system introduced to replace "snake"

1985: Commission launches single market initiative

1986: Single European Act signed

1989: Heads of state accept report by Delors, right, on economic and monetary union. Fall of the Berlin Wall

1992: Maastricht Treaty signed; Danes reject Maastricht, Britain and Italy blown out of exchange rate mechanism

1993: ERM effectively falls apart under speculative pressures in foreign exchange market

1994: Stage two of monetary union starts, European Monetary Institute set up

1995: Single currency to be known henceforth as the euro

1997: Stage three postponed; too few countries meet Maastricht criteria

1998: Eleven countries meet criteria

1999: Euro introduced

2002: Euro notes and coins introduced, national currencies withdrawn.

Arabs in Chicago — The demise of 'The American Dream'

By Sally Bland

IN A SURVEY of Arabs living on Chicago's southwest side, the majority of respondents said that life in the U.S. was not up to their expectations. A majority of the women interviewed felt that life was better "back home," referring to Palestine or Jordan. Aside from political and racial motivated harassment of Arabs in the U.S., the overwhelmingly obvious reason for such sentiments is economics. Sixty per cent of Arab families on Chicago's southwest side can be classified as economically vulnerable: 30 per cent of breadwinners are unemployed, while another 30 per cent work at low-paid jobs. "This is a distressing figure for a community that historically has been economically viable and self-sufficient," concludes sociologist Louise Cantrik, who was commissioned by the Arab American Action Network to conduct the survey. The results were published last summer in a report entitled "Meeting Community Needs, Building on Community strengths," which also includes a history of the Arab community in Chicago.

Things were not always so. From the early years of this century up until the late 1980s, Arab immigrants to Chicago could "depend on well-established family and ethnic networks to help them obtain inexpensive housing, job training and employment." The typical pattern was for already established immigrants to employ newcomers in their shops, where the latter acquired on-the-job training and English language skills. A smaller number of immigrants worked in local factories. Many who started as clerks or peddlers saved up or obtained credit from other Arabs in order to purchase their own businesses. They, in turn, employed the next wave of immigrants.

According to the report, "By the early 1970s, Arabs owned nearly 20 per cent of all small grocery and liquor stores in Chicago," although they represented about one per cent (30,000) of Chicago's population. In the next decade, Arab businesses not only expanded, but also diversified. Arab-owned grocery stores, restaurants, bakeries, insurance and real estate agents, barbers, beauticians, doctors, dentists and lawyers catered to Arab clients on Chicago's southwest side. Successful entrepreneurs moved into suburban housing.

However, in the late 80s, economic and political factors on both sides of the Atlantic combined to disrupt this trend of upward mobility.

Palestinians make up the overwhelming majority of the southwest side Arab community, followed by Jordanians. The original immigrants were almost all male. They came with the idea of working hard, saving money to send back to their families, and returning to live in Palestine. Only with the creation of Israel in 1948 did Palestinian women

begin to come in significant numbers. Immigration increased in the late 1960s as a result of a new U.S. policy, based on family reunification, and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It remained steady until 1989 when there was a dramatic rise. By this time, two decades of occupation had begun to erode Palestinians' initial inclination to remain in their homeland at all costs: "family survival was now at stake. Those who could migrate to the U.S. because of eligibility for family reunification, did so. This time, whole families came at once."

In the 80s, the number of Palestinians studying in the U.S. also increased dramatically. Most were preparing to work

'After the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty "Chicago Palestinians lost the last hope of ever returning to their homeland and emigration from Palestine increased"

in Gulf countries, in order to support their families staying in Palestine. With the 1991 Gulf war, this job market closed abruptly, leaving many with no option but to remain in the U.S. They then brought their families and started new families.

After the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty "Chicago Palestinians lost the last hope of ever returning to their homeland and emigration from Palestine increased," since there were no provisions for the return of exiles, the restoration of confiscated land, or real economic development in Palestine.

With entrepreneurial immigration shifting to whole family relocation, the community self-help network became overloaded. As dynamic as the Arab business sector has been, it cannot offer employment to so many. The majority of new immigrants on the southwest side have a lower level of formal education and English language skills, blocking access to jobs outside the community. For those who did find jobs, wages that once sufficed for single males do not meet the needs of a whole family. Also, Chicago's manufacturing sector has receded: "many of the factories that employed Arab workers on the south-

west side have either closed or drastically downsized in the past 15 years — at the same time that Arab immigration increased." As a result, "Arab immigrants are facing poverty, joblessness, family breakdown and anti-Arab hostility at unprecedented levels." This is most apparent on the southwest side, site of the largest Arab concentration and where most new immigrants come.

As with almost any social group, unemployment brings with it hopelessness and a negative self-image. In some cases, it leads to substance abuse, increased domestic violence and broken homes — things that were previously almost unheard of in the community. Such behaviour impacts on the whole family and on parents' ability to raise their children. Many expressed fears of losing control of their children and of them getting involved in gangs, drugs or criminality. Weakened family ties are perhaps the most devastating aspect of the current problems, for in the U.S. as in the Middle East, "the extended family is the cornerstone of Arab social, cultural and economic life."

To make matters worse, Palestinian organisations which abounded in the 80s, conducting social, cultural, educational and political activities to promote community development, had mainly shut down by the early 90s as their funding dried up.

The Arab American Action Network was founded in 1995, as an outgrowth of the Arab American Community Centre set up in 1974 on the southwest side. It works to improve the quality of life for Chicago's Arab American community by offering culturally appropriate services and educational programmes for families and individuals. With the community facing unprecedented problems, the Network commissioned this needs assessment as the first step to finding new types of solutions.

In the past, the Arab community was rather insular, partly due to their own internal cohesion and strong ties to their homeland. But insularity was also a reaction to being excluded from American politics and civic affairs, and being stereotyped as backward or terrorists. When the community itself had sufficient resources, people seldom sought outside assistance. However, as the report makes clear, now is the time to break out of this insularity, to reach out for the assistance of public institutions and social service agencies, in order to create new programmes, especially for children. The AAAN hopes that this Needs Assessment will ignite the interests of founders, social service agencies, and Arab Americans in building a strong community able to participate fully in and fully contribute to American society."

Copies of the report can be obtained from the Arab American Action Network, 3148 West 63rd Street, Chicago, Illinois, 60629, USA. Email: aaan@aaan.org

Culture

One diarist's Germans

By Richard Cohen

FOR YEARS now, I have been hearing about Victor Klemperer's diaries. For a time, they seemed a mere rumour — the day-by-day account of a "Jewish" intellectual during the entire Nazi period in Germany. The diaries were discovered in the 1960s, transcribed in the 1980s, published in Germany to much excitement and, now published in America — more than 500 pages of an ordinary life in extraordinary times. As drama, they are plodding. As warning, they are chilling.

Mr. Klemperer did not write "I Will Bear Witness" for publication. He had always been an inveterate diarist, persisting even after the Nazis assumed power and it was foolhardy and even life-threatening to do so. He wrote because, among other things, he was a writer. He wrote because he could puzzle things out better that way.

In the end, he wrote because it was his peculiar, personal counterattack, a battle he staged daily: "I shall go on writing. That is my heroism. I will bear witness, precise witness."

He was by no means an ordinary German Jew. In the first place, he was a convert to Protestantism — a Jew only at the insistence of the racist Nazis. His wife was also a Protestant and — another factor that set him apart from many Jews — he had served in a front-line unit during World War I and won the Iron Cross. For these reasons, he was excluded from some of the most oppressive anti-Jewish measures, including, of course, those that would have cost him his life. He survived the war and lived until 1960, a diarist apparently to the end.

But it is the diary he kept from 1933 to

1945 that commands our attention. It is full of fascinating detail, not just what you might expect — a reference to Kristallnacht, for instance, or the partition of Czechoslovakia — but the imposition of laws and regulations that slowly asphyxiated the German-Jewish community.

Mobs did their work, of course, and some people were sent to concentration camps, but in the early days the killing often proceeded slowly — first the livelihood, then the pride, then, ultimately, the will to live. Some Jews emigrated. Some killed themselves.

The diary tells another story as well — and maybe it is one peculiar to Mr. Klemperer, although I doubt it. For the most part, he is not mistreated by his countrymen. He encounters ordinary anti-Semitism, of course, but most of the Germans who find their way into his diaries are not rabid Jew haters. Some of them, in fact, are embarrassed by the Nazi regime's gutter anti-Semitism and, with a degree of courage, tell Mr. Klemperer how they feel.

This is important. For as Martin Chalmers, the English translator of the diaries, points out, Mr. Klemperer's experience contradicts the assertions of such scholars as Daniel Goldhagen, who maintains that the Holocaust was a product of a unique and particularly rabid German hatred of Jews — "eliminationist anti-Semitism," in Mr. Goldhagen's term.

That assertion would come as news to Mr. Klemperer. Instead, he feels he lives in what was once the most benevolent and cultured of all nations. He considers himself a German first, last and above all. He acknowledges cultural anti-Semitism, of course, but not of the sort of the Nazis encouraged and implemented. "I am Ger-

man and I'm waiting for the Germans to return," he wrote in 1942.

In fact, one of the more striking diary entries relates the time in 1938 when Mr. Klemperer pulls up to a roadside restaurant just as a speech by Hermann Goering, one of the top Nazis, is being broadcast: "Not one of a dozen people paid attention to the radio for even a single second," he wrote. "It just as well could have been transmitting silence or a fox trot from Leipzig." Occasionally, non-Jews expressed sympathy for him and sent gifts of this or that — cigarettes, food.

In a way, this is bad news. It has always been oddly comforting to ascribe the Holocaust to something peculiarly German — their allegedly extreme anti-Semitism, above all. But Mr. Klemperer is telling us that was not the case: These people are like any others. They are afraid. They have no rights. Dissidents have disappeared.

"Eliminationist anti-Semitism" appears to be mostly imposed from above. The killers are not necessarily haters. Some are merely cowed conformists.

If that is the case, it means that the Holocaust was not some exotic and inexplicable event where those weird Germans killed those weird Jews — a conundrum that will make but one appearance — but an atrocity that could be duplicated. Since it happened in one place once, it could happen in another place again. That is the lesson.

The Holocaust, Victor Klemperer's diaries suggest, tells us a little about Germans, a little about Jews — but an awful lot about us all.

— The International Herald Tribune

Shackleton comes in from the cold

By David Lister

The Endurance
Caroline Alexander
Bloomsbury
London
\$40

PICTURES NEVER seen before of Shackleton's expedition to the South Pole are to be published in a new book. The images tell an astonishing story of the crew's months of waiting to be rescued after their ship had sunk; and they show the chilling beauty of Antarctica.

The pictures, some of which are reproduced here, range from a game of football on the polar ice to skinning a penguin for food.

In August 1914 Sir Ernest Shackleton and a crew of 27 set sail aboard *The Endurance* bound for the South Atlantic. Their goal was to be the first men to cross Antarctica, the last unclaimed prize in the history of exploration. Weaving a treacherous path through the icy Weddell Sea, they were within 80 miles of their destination when the ship was

trapped in the ice.

For the next 10 months they waited for the ice to break, but it never happened and *The Endurance* was crushed under the floes and sank on November 21, 1915. For the next five months the crew was stranded on the ice floes before reaching the relative safety of Elephant Island.

Then Shackleton and five of his crew set off in a boat to help 800 miles away in South Georgia. After four rescue attempts, Shackleton and every member of his crew returned home safely.

A new book by the American academic Caroline Alexander charts how they survived. And it also tells another miraculous survival story — those of the photographs of Frank Hurley, the Australian photographer who joined the crew of *The Endurance* to document their expected achievement.

Hurley's images, most of which have never been seen before, recreate the crew's daily struggles to stay alive. The story of the pictures' survival is a remarkable one.

The glass-plate negatives were

stored in hermetically sealed canisters that lasted five months on the ice floes, a week in an open boat on the polar seas and five months buried in the snows of a rocky outcrop called Elephant Island.

Although ordered to abandon his negatives in the wreck of *The Endurance*, Hurley dived several times into the freezing waters before rescuing them. Towards the end of the ordeal Hurley had to abandon most of his equipment and captured many of the moments with a pocket camera and a single roll of Kodak film.

Movie film footage that Hurley took has now been restored by the British Film Institute and will be shown next month at the National Film Theatre.

When the financiers of Shackleton's expedition first saw the expedition footage they felt it was not commercial enough, lacking any scenes of polar animal life. So Hurley was ordered to return for shots of penguins and elephant seals.

— The Observer

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Maan deputy blames 'improper planning, for creating 'less fortunate regions'

The government claims that the poverty rate in Maan is seven per cent and that the average per capita income is JD80 a month when the poverty rate is 50 per cent and unemployment exceeds 30 per cent in the governorate, said Waleed Awajan, a member of the Lower House from Maan. "In every spot there, a person can see the aspects of abject poverty which has went below the red line and the unemployment which went up beyond the normal level," he indicated stressing that there has not been any correct and accurate field studies about this matter.

The deputy said the consecutive governments have not conducted any proper planning and such a situation has created what is now described as "the less fortunate regions." Awajan added: "This means that there was total neglect for some segments of the society or some regions while other areas were reaping the benefits of development. This proves that there was no fairness or equality in (wealth) distribution."

Asked about a project for manufacturing filters, the deputy said the plant was to be set up in Maan in accordance with the directives from HRH Crown Prince Hassan but the project was moved to Karak at the wishes of two members of the board of directors. Awajan talked also about the Shidiyeh phosphate mine and "although it is one of the biggest investment compounds in the Kingdom, the governorate hears about it as if it is in another place." He said Maan has not received any benefits or returns from the Shidiyeh phosphate mine.

Awajan described the ties between the management of the phosphate company and the mine as the relationship between a foreigner and another country. "The general manager visits any part in the Kingdom or abroad more than he visits Shidiyeh or Al Hasa," he said. The deputy accused the phosphate company of not presenting accurate figures and "consequently," we demand that the Bureau of Audit and the Bureau of Control and Inspection intervene to verify the accuracy of the figures.

Replying to a question on whether the Aqaba Railway Corporation (ARC) brings in development returns to the governorate, Awajan said the ARC is the sole lung through which the people of Maan breathe. "But, regrettably, the ARC has been neglected during the past decade and it did not receive the necessary support from the government." Noting that there is an unjustified strong enthusiasm on the part of the government to privatise the ARC, the Maan deputy stressed that what is required is to stand by the corporation to rehabilitate its cadres and activate its role in serving the local community.

He wondered why the wagons of the railway do not load goods on the return journey from Aqaba to Maan especially when the wagons remain empty. He noted that such a measure would ease traffic congestion of trucks between Aqaba and Maan. In addition, Awajan indicated, the corporation can be employed as a tourist investment by running a tourism train between Maan and Aqaba through the areas of Wadi Rum (Al Arab Al Yawm).

Britain announces plan to encourage private pensions

LONDON (AFP) — Britain's Labour government announced a shake-up of the pension system recently, including a guaranteed minimum income for the elderly, but with an emphasis on persuading people to take private pensions.

Currently 40 per cent of pensioners are on private plans and 60 per cent on state pensions, but the government wants to reverse that to remove some of the massive burden of looking after the growing number of elderly from the state coffers.

Social Security Secretary Alistair Darling said the proposed plan, which is still in the early stages before being put to a vote

in parliament, centred around those being able to save.

The government said it plans to offer incentives to people earning more than 9,000 pounds (\$14,400) a year, a relatively small salary in Britain, to take private funded pensions.

However, Darling said he had rejected privatising the entire system and compelling middle-income earners to take private pensions.

"The overall amount spent on pensions will go up, but private pensions will take an increasing share," he said.

Once the new scheme was up and running, "we will reshape the system to make private funded pen-

sions the only sensible option for those above 9,000 pounds," Darling said.

"In turn, the government has a responsibility to provide security in retirement for those who cannot save enough," he said.

Darling said the plan was "manageable, affordable and workable" and avoided a potential situation in which one third of retirees would be in poverty by 2050.

"Our radical new contract for pensions will ensure security for those who can't provide for themselves and encourage those who can save for their retirement to do so," he said.

Average U.S. consumer PC price falls below \$1000

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The average price of a desktop consumer personal computer (PC) fell below \$1000 for the first time in November, according to a study released last week by market research firm PC Data.

It also said Apple Computer's iMac computer was the top-selling PC in U.S. retail stores and through mail order. Prices fell on both high- and low-end systems in Novem-

ber, according to PC Data, with sub \$1000 systems making up 58.5 per cent of the market.

Helping the demand for lower-priced PCs was increasing acceptance of processors from makers like Advanced Micro Devices, the survey found.

PCs priced over \$1500 made up only 10 per cent of the retail market, according to the study.

PC Data said the iMac accounted for 7.1 per cent of all unit sales and 8.2 per cent of total retail revenues in the United States.

Hewlett-Packard's Pavilion 6355, with an Intel Celeron processor, was the number one PC under \$1000 in November.

Compaq Computer Corp's Presario 5150 with an Advanced Micro Devices Inc's K6-2 processor was second in sales that month.

ECB chief says interest rates could be cut further if prices stay stable

HAMBURG (AFP) — European Central Bank (ECB) President, Wim Duisenberg, has declined to rule out further reductions in interest rates if prices remained stable but warned that euro-zone governments are scarcely cutting public deficits.

In an interview to be published in the weekly newspaper Die Zeit recently, Duisenberg said that although interest rates were currently at historically low levels, if price stability were attained, "we must try to get interest rates as low as possible."

He said that "that is the maximum contribution" monetary policy can make to growth. But the "margins (for manoeuvre) are very narrow, because long-term interest rates are already at a historically low level."

"Monetary policy can't do a lot more," the ECB president said. "Interest rates are at a historical low and have only a limited

effect on investment anyway."

"It is up to others to improve the conditions for growth and employment so that more is invested," he added.

Duisenberg said that one of the ECB's biggest concerns at present was the fact that public sector deficits "are hardly being cut" at all.

In the euro area as a whole, the deficit ratio would be cut by 0.3-0.4 percentage point and by only 0.1 percentage point next year, Duisenberg said.

In contrast, between 1993 and 1997 the ratio of public sector deficits to gross domestic product declined by an average one percentage point each year, he said.

"But the stability pact is very clear that budgets must either be balanced or in surplus. That goal is moving further and further away on the horizon," Duisenberg said.

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Company	Open Price	Close Price	Change
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THE HOUSING BK	2,640	2,650	+0.38%
JO. KURATY BK	1,560	1,560	0.00%
JO. GULF BK	0,680	0,680	+1.47%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1,660	1,660	+1.19%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0,550	0,550	0.00%
BANKS INDEX	275.730	point =	+0.39%
INSURANCE			
JO. FRENCH INS	2,720	2,700	-0.74%
ARAB INS	1,900	1,920	+1.05%
INSURANCE INDEX	123.440	point =	+0.02%
SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1,480	1,480	0.00%
HOTEL & TOURISM	9,430	9,500	+0.74%
URBAN ELECTRICITY	1,620	1,600	-1.23%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0,800	0,780	-2.50%
JO. INT'L TRADING CENT	0,300	0,300	0.00%
AL-RAT	5,400	5,400	0.00%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	0,820	0,840	+2.44%
ARAB INT'L FOR INVS &	1,320	1,320	0.00%
UNIFIED L&O TRANS	1,110	1,110	0.00%
UNITED FOR FINANCIAL I	1,110	1,170	+5.41%
SERVICES INDEX	106.100	point =	-0.05%
INDUSTRY			
CEMENT	3,100	3,080	-0.65%
PHOSPHATE	1,400	1,470	+5.00%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10,300	10,150	-1.46%
THE INT. COMM. & AGRIC	1,100	1,150	+4.55%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2,550	2,550	0.00%
CERAMIC IND	1,100	1,100	0.00%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1,210	1,220	+0.83%
THE PUBLIC MINING	1,850	1,850	0.00%
DAR AL DAWA	4,890	4,900	+0.20%
JO. STEEL	0,870	0,870	0.00%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	1,850	1,880	+1.62%
PETRO-CHEMICAL	0,320	0,330	+3.13%
ROCKWOOL	0,330	0,310	-6.06%
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	1,070	1,050	-1.87%
ZALADIN	2,050	1,990	-2.93%
NTL CABLE	0,670	0,660	-1.49%
NTL ALUMINIUM	0,680	0,690	+1.47%
INDUSTRY INDEX	76.420	point =	+0.16%
PARALLEL			
JO. TRADING FACILITIES	0,410	0,430	+4.88%
AL-EKBAL	0,790	0,780	-1.27%
ADVANCED PHAR	0,570	0,550	-3.51%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0,370	0,370	0.00%
AL DAWLAH	0,570	0,560	-1.75%
ARAB INT'L TRADE	0,210	0,210	0.00%
SPECIALIZED INVS	1,100	1,040	-5.45%
OPTICAL & AUDIO	0,510	0,500	-1.96%
READY MIX CONCRETE	0,820	0,820	0.00%
NAMICO	0,270	0,280	+3.70%
ZIMMEL EAST PHAR 90	0,580	0,570	-1.72%
UNITED ENG. IND	0,210	0,210	0.00%
NTL POLITYRY	0,560	0,560	0.00%
ZARA	1,380	1,450	+5.07%
NUTRI DAR	0,690	0,680	-1.45%
ARAB JO. INVS	0,930	0,980	+5.38%
GRAND INDEX	167.05	point =	+0.31%



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RJR Nabisco plans 4,200 job cuts worldwide

WINSTON-SALEM, North Carolina (AFP) — RJR Nabisco on recently announced that its RJ Reynolds tobacco unit would take a fourth-quarter pre-tax charge of \$390 million to cover the elimination of 4,200 jobs in worldwide operations.

Citing retail price increases and expenses stemming from last month's \$206 billion settlement between the U.S. tobacco industry and 46 states to pay for the treatment of sick smokers, RJR Nabisco said it expected lower cigarette sales.

As a result, 1,300 jobs would be cut in its domestic tobacco business and a pre-tax charge of \$335 million would be applied to the fourth quarter.

The money will also be used to cover the scaling down of certain equipment and facilities in the United States.

In the international tobacco business, a \$55 million pre-tax charge will be needed to cover the loss of 2,900 company jobs in Russia and other members of the Common-

wealth of Independent States.

"We knew when we agreed to resolve the state tobacco litigation that the domestic tobacco company would have to make enormous sacrifices financially and operationally," said Steven Goldstone, RJR Nabisco chairman.

"The international tobacco business has to meet the challenge of unprecedented economic upheaval in Russia and other CIS economies, just as other Western companies are being forced to do," he added.

"We believe this region continues to have enormous potential and the steps we are taking to enhance margins will enable these businesses to begin to get these problems behind them, stabilise earnings and resume growth next year."

The company said the combined pre-tax savings at the tobacco unit would amount to more than \$175 million annually.

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Quebec to sue IOC if Salt Lake allegations proven

MONTREAL (AFP) — The man who led the city of Quebec's bid to win the right to host the 2002 Winter Olympics said he will sue the IOC if allegations of corruption surrounding the winning bid by Salt Lake City are proven.

Rene Paquet, ex-president of the 2002 Quebec committee, said that he would bring a damages suit against the IOC for expenses incurred by the government and big business organisations who financed the failed bid, which garnered only seven votes compared to the 54 which Salt Lake City received.

"I definitely will consider that — not for myself, I was a volunteer, but for those who put up the money to finance our bid (\$7.5 million)," Paquet told the Toronto Sun.

Paquet, who is a lawyer by profession, added he had spoken to those involved with another bid for the 2002 Games, the Swedish delegation of Ostersund, who finished distant runners-up with the Swiss city of Sion on 14 votes, and they were also keen to take the IOC to court.

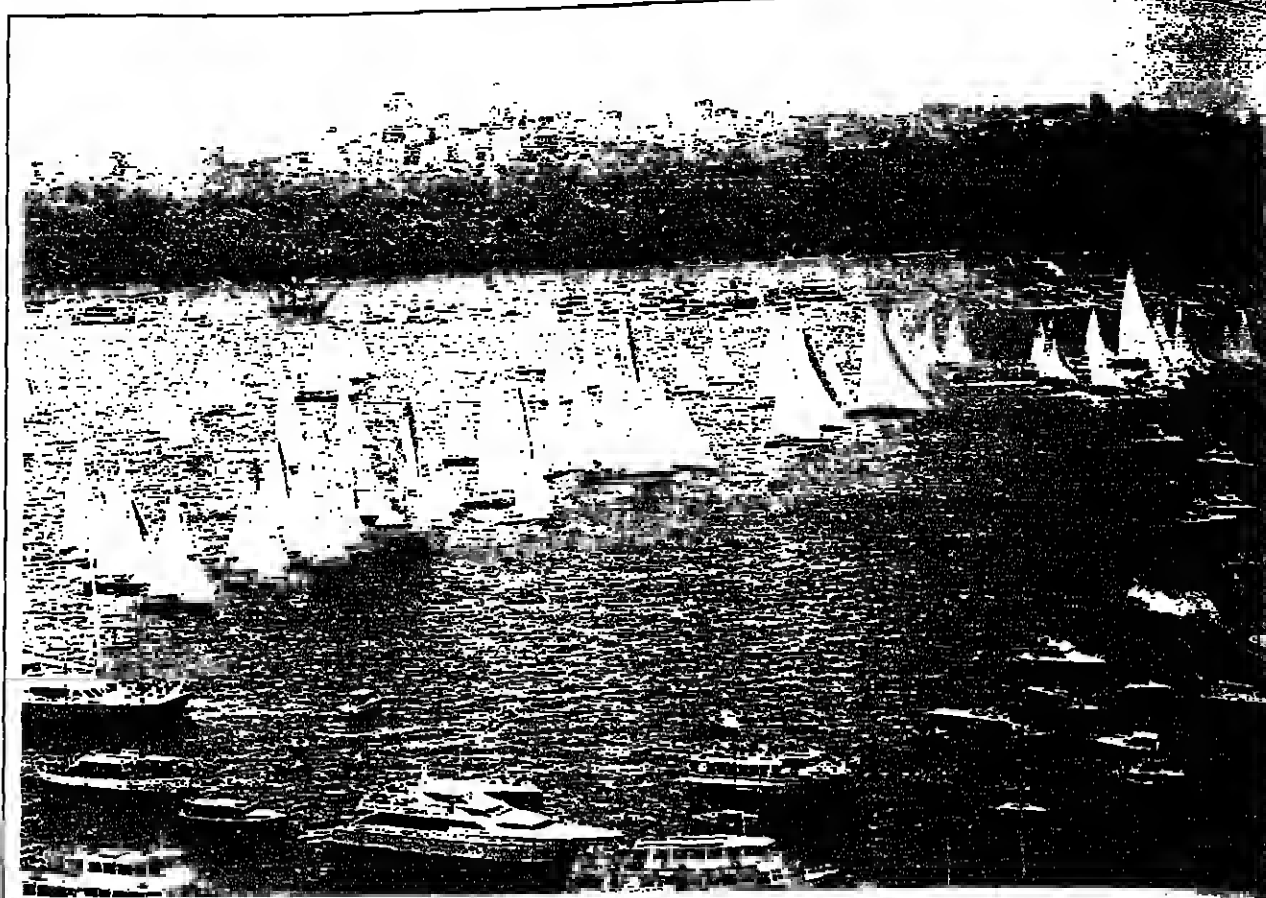
"I talked to a colleague in Ostersund and we agreed to talk to each other after the New Year and

proceed from there," Paquet said.

The IOC, the American Olympic Committee (USOC) and the FBI have all opened investigations into the allegations made by senior IOC member Marc Holder two weeks ago that a \$500,000 scholarship fund set up by Salt Lake City benefitted relatives of six IOC voting members.

However, IOC vice-president Dick Pound, a leading candidate to replace current IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch when he retires in 2002 and who is leading the enquiry into the corruption allegations surrounding Salt Lake City, has already dismissed the legal challenges of Quebec and Ostersund.

"It's not as if Quebec ever came close to winning. No one was close. Salt Lake was the city to beat and Quebec did not have a chance," the Canadian said.



The start boat at bottom right fires the gun and smoke gets the fleet on the way at the start of the yachting classic The Sydney to Hobart on Sydney Harbour December 26 (AP photo)

Olympic question: When is a gift a bribe?

NEW YORK (AP) — There are gifts, favours and possibly bribes among Olympic perks.

And then, there are bulldozers. As the International Olympic Committee wrestles with its greatest ethics scandal and three panels investigate alleged bribery in Salt Lake City's bid for the Winter Games, IOC members and potential host cities face the issue of where friendliness ends and corruption begins.

Atlanta, like most bid cities, handed out gifts to visiting IOC members, and at least one had four legs and a wet nose — a bulldog for a Cuban delegate.

"You get caught up in the entertainment mode and you may do things that stretch the rules," said Charlie Bartle, who was in charge of international relations in Atlanta's winning bid for the 1996 Olympics. "You go over the top."

In what may have been one of the most creative acts of gift-giving, Atlanta boss Billy Payne gave a bulldog to IOC member Manuel Gonzalez Guerra after he admired Uga, the mascot of Payne's alma mater, the University of Georgia.

"The biggest problem we had was getting Customs to let him take the dog back," Bartle said. "They don't like people taking things to Havana from the United States. Maybe they were afraid we were hiding spy gear in his collar."

There's no way of knowing if Guerra voted for Atlanta in the secret balloting in Tokyo in 1990, and IOC rules now limit gifts to a total of \$150 a member — meaning any current canine giveaways would probably involve a mutt.

In the two weeks since the Salt Lake Organizing Committee said families of six IOC members received \$400,000 in college scholarships during its successful bid for the 2002 Winter Games, Olympic organisers past, present and future have defended their work amid allegations that the scandal extends far beyond Utah.

Marc Hodler, the IOC's senior member and one of its most respected, said 5 to 7 per cent of the committee's 115 members were open to bribes and that vote buying occurred in the campaigns for the 1996, 1998 and 2000 Olympics.

Olympic organisers and IOC members say they have done nothing wrong and played by the rules, but they also acknowledged that those rules are now being drastically tightened by the Salt Lake case.

"I would think that after what has happened, any U.S. city bidding for the Olympics in the next 30 years is going to be so squeaky clean they'll have Ivory soap for a sponsor," said Sue Loder, coordinator of San Francisco's bid for the 2012 Summer Games.

Loder's committee and seven other cities in the early stages of the race to be America's choice for 2012 operate under 23 pages of ethics guidelines set down by the U.S. Olympic Committee.

Among other things, the bidders are barred from any contact with the IOC until the USOC picks its candidate in 2002, three years before the international panel votes, and must keep gifts to a total of \$50 a person during the prelimi-

nary phase and \$150 if they reach the finals.

"The USOC has made it clear to us what we can and cannot do," said Nick Vehr, the head of Cincinnati's bid. "We have their entire undertaking on limits of gifts and such."

The USOC had no rules on bidding when Salt Lake City finally won the Olympics on its fifth try in 1995, according to committee president Bill Hybl.

The IOC imposed its first limits in 1986, after the volume of gifts and favours in the campaigns for the 1992 Games became embarrassing. Those "tokens" included fur coats, diamond jewelry and unlimited first-class travel for members who wanted one more peek at cities like Paris, Barcelona and Brisbane.

"There was a great deal of concern, because there were no rules," said Anita DeFrantz, an IOC vice president from the United States.

Racks of minks and expensive porcelain are no longer wheeled through the lobby of hotels housing IOC members — but bidders still know how to catch a member's attention.

Paul Henderson, who ran Toronto's 1996 bid, told The Toronto Star that Atlanta "set the standards" that triggered the current scandal. He said he suspected that Salt Lake City got the scholarship idea from its U.S. predecessor.

Henderson offered no evidence to support his suspicions and Bartle denied any wrongdoing, saying a personal touch helped Atlanta win, while staying within the rules.

He said organisers made sure a visiting IOC member received proper care when he complained of chest pain during a 1990 visit. The member, David Sikhuluni Sibande of Swaziland, has been linked to unusual gifts or favours in Salt Lake City, Sydney and Falun, Sweden, which bid for the 1998 Winter Games.

Doctors in Salt Lake have confirmed providing free medical care — including plastic surgery — for IOC members at the request of bid organisers.

But Bartle said Sibande's hospitalisation in Atlanta was an emergency and not an attempt to curry favour.

"He had heart pain while he was here. He was admitted to the hospital and spent an extra day. He didn't come here for treatment," Bartle said.

Eight grand slam singles winners in '98

NEW YORK (AP) — Parity ruled tennis in 1998, a year when eight players captured grand slam singles titles — four for the first time — and a few stalwarts of the old guard withstood the challenges of feisty young upstarts.

In the end, Pete Sampras secured the men's No. 1 ranking for a record sixth straight year, a feat he can't imagine anyone else matching, and Lindsay Davenport grabbed the women's top spot for the first time.

"I know what it takes," Sampras said of his long reign. "I really don't see anyone in today's game having the consistency, having the durability that it takes to be No. 1 six years. That is the majority of a career. You need the game, you need the heart, you need the mind. Some guys have two of the three. Some guys have a little bit of the three. In order to do it for six years, you need everything."

The competition is so

fierce in tennis these days, with anyone in the top 100 capable of beating anyone else, Sampras said, that it would take an extraordinary player to come along and do what he has done.

"Maybe when I'm done playing, or when I'm 56 years old, there might be somebody able to do it," he said.

Sanchez-Vicario proved she's not quite ready for retirement at 26 as she won for the third time at Roland Garros.

At Wimbledon, Sampras won for the fifth time in six years to gain his 11th major title, and 29-year-old Jana Novotna finally delivered more smiles than tears in her third shot at the champi-

TENNIS IN REVIEW

The depth of the game on the men's and women's tours was evident from the start of the year to the finish.

Along the way, it was a free-for-all. Scissor-kicking 30-year-old Petr Korda won his first major at the Australian Open, where Martina Hingis briefly continued her one-year dominance of the women's tour.

Spain's Carlos Moya notched his first big title at the French Open, while compatriot Arantxa

onship.

When the U.S. Open rolled around, Patrick Rafter proved his '97 victory was no fluke, and Davenport produced the most solid performance of her six-year career to win her first major.

Yet beyond the diversity of all those grand slam champions, there were others who filled out the year with grand moments, great challenges and promises for the future.

Monica Seles, once indomitable before



Pete Sampras

tragedies and injuries took their toll, came tantalizingly close to a fairy-tale triumph in France just three weeks after her father-coach, Karolj, died of cancer.

The crowd and virtually the whole tennis world was pulling for Seles, and even Sanchez-Vicario, who beat her in their three-set final, would have been happy to see her opponent win.

Steffi Graf made a fitful return to the game at Wimbledon after a year-long absence due to injuries and cried when she spoke of how she had briefly considered retirement.

And though the 29-year-old Fraulein Forehand never quite overcame her rustiness, she sparkled at times and showed she might have another major or two left in her if she can stay healthy.

Venus Williams started off the year boasting that she would be No. 1 by the end. She finished a respectable No. 5, and would surprise no one if she delivered on her promise this year. Her younger sister, Serena, didn't develop quite as much, but remains a threat at No. 20.

On the men's tour, Marcelo Rios made his mark, reaching his first major final at the Australian, ascending to the No. 1 spot for a total of six weeks, and finishing No. 2 with seven titles in eight finals.

The Chilean became the first South American to rank No. 1 in the 25-year history of the ATP rankings.

Spain's Alex Corretja, who lost to compatriot Moya in the French final, closed out the year by taking the ATP Tour World Championship in Germany to finish No. 3 in the rankings. A winner on carpet, clay and hard courts this year, with five titles in seven finals, Corretja had the highest season-ending ranking of any Spaniard in ATP history.

Andre Agassi never got beyond the fourth round of a major during the year, but he worked his way back into playing shape with the biggest one-year jump into the Top 10 in ATP history by climbing from No. 122 to No. 6. He led the tour with 10 finals, won half of those, and equaled Rios for the tour lead with 68 match wins.



Monica Seles

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	Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	Shows: 6:15, 8:30, 10:45	Shows: 6:15, 8:30, 10:45	

Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

McGwire and Yankees bring baseball's finest hours

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Mark McGwire's astonishing 70 home runs and the New York Yankees' overwhelming romp to the World Series title capped a record-setting season that might be the greatest in baseball history.

Retaining its place as the American pastime, baseball flourished in 1998 as global attention fixed on the homer race between St. Louis first baseman McGwire and Dominican outfielder Sammy Sosa of the Chicago Cubs.

McGwire broke the major league single-season record of 61 homers, set in 1961 by Roger Maris of the Yankees, on September 8 and reached the once-unimaginable 70 on September 27 with two homers in the season-ending.

"I can't believe I did it, can you?" McGwire said. "It's a great feeling."

Reaching the 70 plateau... never, thought about the magnitude of 70? Obviously it's a huge number, it's unheard of."

Sosa fought McGwire all season, twice pulling ahead in the homer race. But each time his edge lasted less than an hour until the red-headed slugger equalised.

Sosa finished with 66 homers, an impressive feat in any season, and lifted the Cubs into the playoffs, although their trip was short-lived.

"I've been associated with Sammy Sosa and I've been doing all right with all the other players," McGwire said. "It's been a great year for everybody."

But it did not come without controversy. McGwire admitted taking performance-enhancing drugs, which has longer training and more building workouts without fear of injury.

"Andro" is banned by the International Olympic Committee and National Football League, among others, but not by Major League Baseball, luckily for McGwire.

McGwire, who had been injury prone in past years but healthy in 1998.

The playoffs and World Series were somewhat of an anti-climax.

The Yankees won an American League-record 114 regular season games, falling only two shy of the all-time mark, then went on to sweep the San Diego Padres in four games for their 24th World Series championship.

"I have never been around a more courageous group, a more determined group," Yankee manager Joe Torre said. "To have the record we had going during the course of the year and keep it going, not take a day off, that to me is an indication of something special."

Orlando Hernandez, a Cuban defector whose brother Livan led Florida to the 1997 Series title, hurled two key play-off triumphs for the Yankees, a club likely to be recalled as the game's greatest team.

Lacking a record homer hitter such as Babe Ruth,

ever for a reigning Series champion.

Even big spenders had no assurance of success as Baltimore had an \$80-million shopping trip but lacked the chemistry to even reach the play-offs. But they rebuilt during baseball's biggest free agent spending spree.

Brown, who led teams to the World Series the past two years, topped them all after Rupert Murdoch's club had otherwise been locked out of the free agent market.

Catcher Mike Piazza signed a seven-year, \$91 million contract, what had been the richest in baseball history, to stay with the New York Mets after the Dodgers decided his price was too high.

The Mets also signed pitcher Al Leiter to a deal worth \$32 million over four years and third baseman Robin Ventura for \$32 million over four years.

Piazza's money record lasted exactly one month, until Mo Vaughn got a six-year deal worth \$80 million to

BASEBALL IN REVIEW

who hit 60 for the 1927 "Murderer's Row" Yankees, or Maris and Mickey Mantle who powered the 1961 Yankees, this team won with teamwork, defence, pitching and stamina.

"Comparisons will go on and on," Series Most Valuable Player Scott Brosius said. "Maybe nobody will have a definite answer for the best team of all time. But you can look at this year and say we had the best single season, and that's a great accomplishment."

The club can afford spending \$80 million on a winner because of extra profit available in New York, but baseball broke into a few true contenders and a woeful lower class.

"It's scary," San Diego general manager Kevin Towers said. "The disparity in the game is spooky. You have clubs offering players more than what some people pay for franchises."

Most tragic were the Florida Marlins, who won the World Series but were dismantled to cut payroll costs. Their shameful last-place showing was the worst

leave Boston for Anaheim in November.

Boston hoped to replace Vaughn with Bernie Williams, but the American League batting leader stayed with the Yankees for a seven-year deal worth \$87.5 million.

Then Randy Johnson, the lanky left-handed pitcher dubbed "Big Unit," signed a four-year deal with Arizona for \$53 million — the second biggest annual salary ever handed out.

Baltimore was thwarted when Texas signed away first baseman Rafael Palmeiro for \$45 million over five years and Atlanta kept coveted outfielder Brian Jordan for \$40 million over five years.

The Orioles responded by signing controversial outfielder Albert Belle to a five-year deal for \$65 million and taking Texas first baseman Will Clark for \$45 million over five years.

Baltimore also added catcher Charles Johnson in a trade, signed second baseman Delino DeShields to replace departed Roberto Alomar and spent big to keep outfielder B.J. Surhoff.

Chelsea down Southampton to top English Premiership

LONDON (AFP) — Chelsea's star-studded multi-national side got goals from Norwegian Tore Andre Flo and Uruguayan Gustavo Poyet as they downed Southampton 2-0 at The Dell on Saturday to grab the lead in the English Premiership.

Chelsea, unbeaten in the Premiership since the opening day of the season, now have 36 points from 19 matches to head Aston Villa, who were due to be in action later in the day, on goal difference.

In other matches that kicked off at midday, fast-improving Arsenal won 1-0 at home to West Ham to maintain their unbeaten home record and stay within four points of the lead, while Wimbledon beat fast-sinking Charlton 2-1 in the south London derby at Selhurst Park.

A superb piece of skill from Italian ace Gianfranco Zola shot Chelsea into a 20th-minute lead against relegation strugglers Southampton at The Dell.

Zola broke and unleashed a splendid chip for Norwegian striker Tore Andre Flo, whose right-foot volley rocketed into the net.

The goal ignited the game and Chelsea almost doubled their lead shortly afterwards. Dane Bjarne Goldbaek fired a vicious shot at goal which goalkeeper Paul Jones saved superbly but couldn't hold — causing a scramble in the Saints' goalmouth which ended with a Jody Morris shot deflected inches wide of the post.

Chelsea goalkeeper Ed de Goey made several key saves before the break, but Chelsea took a two-goal lead just three minutes after half-time.

Zola and Romanian Dan Petrescu played their part in the build-up and Petrescu's low cross from the right wing reared up from the slippery surface, causing keeper Jones to fumble the ball straight into the path of Poyet.

Chelsea's leading scorer netted from eight metres out for his 11th goal of the season and maintain the run which has seen no English-born player score for the London club this season in the Premiership.

West Ham's resistance lasted just seven minutes at Highbury.

Ray Parlour fed Marc



An international celebration: Norway's Tore Andre Flo (2nd right) is congratulated by Chelsea teammates (left-right) Gustavo Poyet of Uruguay, Italian midfielder Gianfranco Zola and Romanian Dan Petrescu after scoring in their Premiership clash with Southampton, at The Dell (AFP photo)



Arsenal London's French forward Nicolas Anelka (R) evades a challenge from West Ham's Rio Ferdinand, during their Premiership clash at Arsenal's Highbury stadium (AFP photo)

Overmars and the pacy Dutch winger cut inside and beat Hammers' goalkeeper Shaka Hislop at the near post.

Arsenal continued to press forward as panic spread in the Hammers' back five.

Arsenal, resurgent after their 3-1 win over Leeds, dominated the game for long periods but were unable to score again — thus making it an unhappy return to North London for West Ham's former Arsenal star Ian Wright, who had two chances to equalise late in the game but missed them both.

Record-signing Neil Redfern put Charlton in front after 29 minutes — their first goal in four games —

with a curling shot from 25 metres out, but Jason Euell equalised just four minutes later when he drove the ball home from eight metres after a pass from Michael Hughes. It was Euell's seventh goal of the season.

Robbie Earle cleared off the line in the 45th minute and Wimbledon took full advantage of the let-off when they scored the winner six minutes after the re-start.

Carl Leaburn set up the decider against his former club and the ball fell for Hughes to make it 2-1.

Charlton, who started the season so brightly, suffered their sixth straight loss and are without a win in nine games.

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Sri Lanka's former star sprinter to run from home

COLOMBO (AFP) — Sri Lanka's controversial sprinter Susanthika Jayasinghe is set to go abroad amid growing opposition after her last minute withdrawal from the Asian Games, press reports and officials said Friday.

Jayasinghe, the world 200m silver medalist who is at the centre of a doping inquiry, pulled out after wounding a hamstring in the 100m semi-finals at this month's Asian Games in Thailand.

However, the Sri Lankan contingent was clearly unhappy with her withdrawal but the last minute substitute Damayanthi Dharsha took the gold in Jayasinghe's main 200m event.

Dharsha who also won gold in the 400m event has now replaced Jayasinghe as Sri Lanka's new sprint queen.

The English language The Island newspaper said that Jayasinghe, 23, is now planning to go to Australia or an European country for training because she was "banned" by local officials.

When she joined the world elite by winning Sri Lanka's first world track medal last year she became an instant heroine among the 18.3 million people in Sri Lanka.

But things soon soured. First it was reported she was an army deserter. Then she failed a drugs test for an anabolic steroid. She claims she is the victim of Sri Lankan sports officials trying to control her. She was painted as struggling to make ends meet after being ditched by her sponsors.

In August, however, the tide turned in her favour when an independent Sri Lankan appeals panel cleared her of drugs abuse. But she is far from being in the clear.

The sport's world governing body, the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF), is unhappy with the panel's decision, and have set up a new board to reopen the case.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TAMMAM HIRSHCH
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HOW TO SET UP A TRICK

Both vulnerable South deals.

NORTH

♠ 7 6 3

♣ 5

♦ 8 6 4

♥ A Q 7 3 2

WEST

♠ K J 10 2

♣ 10 8 4

♦ 10 8 7 2

♥ A J 5

SOUTH

♠ A 5 4

♣ A 9 8 5

♦ A K Q J

♥ 10 6

The bidding:

NORTH WEST NORTH EAST

10 Pass 1A Pass

2NT Pass

Opening lead: Jack of ♠

for one-no-trump openings, so the bidding was identical at the two tables. I could not think of a better rebid than two no trump at my second turn despite the lack of a club stopper.

The opening lead was the same at both tables — the jack of clubs. At the other table declarer covered with the queen, losing the trick to East's king. Back came a heart, taken by the king in dummy. There were nine tricks available, but no way to untrump the clubs.

Declarer tried to set up a long spade by ducking a spade, but that didn't work. Since the defenders alerted returned a club to break the link to dummy, no endplay was possible and South eventually conceded down one.

I must confess that I almost played the hand exactly the same way. I was about to reach for the queen of clubs at trick one when I saw the difficulties that would arise. As is so often the case once you recognize the problem, the solution is simple enough. I rose with the ace of clubs and led a low club to my ten. Although that lost to the king, the long of hearts was still in dummy as an entry to the queen of clubs, and nine tricks were there for the taking.

As ever Omar

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Tender Notice + Changing the submission date Technical Solution Projects for Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) and Securities Depository Center (SDC)

Jordan Securities Commission (JSC) invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for the supply, installation, full commissioning, and training for Phone Exchange System, Uninterruptible Power Supply System, and Computer Network Solution. The new solutions to be procured by the Jordan Securities Commission will be installed at the new premises (Hamzeh Building) encompassing Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) and Securities Depository Center (SDC).

Two detailed tender documents identifying the requirements and specifications are available immediately for a non-refundable amount of thirty (30) Jordanian dinars per tender at the following address:

Administration and Financial Department
Amman Financial Market
Housing Bank Complex, Sixth Floor
Shmelsani
Tel.: 560-7171

— It has been agreed to extend the submission date of proposals to be at 12 noon, Tuesday, January 12th, because of Christmas and New Year holidays.
— Proposals are to be submitted to Administration and Financial Department, Amman Financial Market.

This notice forms an integral part of the Tender Documents.

'Make A Difference'

The Directorate of Women's Affairs in the Jordanian Armed Forces is looking to recruit two Jordanian female, college graduates, to attend the Officer training course at the world renowned Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, U.K.

The Directorate of Women's Affairs is charged with the responsibilities of improving and reshaping the future roles of women serving in the JAF. If you are a natural leader, ready to take on a challenging and fulfilling career in our Armed Forces, we are looking for you.

The job entails shaping future policies, opening new job roles for women, pioneering new ideas and projects, travel, and chances to further educate yourself on military courses both within Jordan and overseas. If you wish to be part of a modern, forward thinking Directorate and be a role model for future generations, we want you.

You must fall into these guidelines: Jordanian, between the ages of 20 to 25 years old, physically fit, college graduate with no less than a Bachelors degree, (preferably, but not exclusively in the following majors: Administration, Law, Psychology, Physical Fitness, Sociology, or Social Science). Must be fluent in Arabic and English. If you are adventurous, inspired to make a difference, and ready to take on the challenge, please send your CV/resume to the following fax number 535-9-343

"Make a Difference"

To apply please go to the Directorate of Officers' Affairs; Public Relations Office in General Headquarters, Jabal Weibdeh, Amman. You must bring with you the following:

1. A certified copy of your University Degree.
2. College transcript.
3. A document showing the equivalency of degrees from foreign universities to that of Jordanian universities. In addition to a document proving you are not committed to the Ministry of Education.
4. The original birth certificate.
5. A certified copy of the "Family book."
6. Two passport photographs.

Applications will be received up until the 10th of January 1999.

Netanyahu denies report of Lebanon pullout plan

TEL AVIV (AP) — With the government under mounting pressure to find a way to get Israeli troops out of Lebanon, a newspaper reported Friday that the cabinet would be presented this weekend with a plan for a phased withdrawal. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied the report.

"There was no decision like that at all," Netanyahu told Israel TV, saying that while Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon supported unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon, the cabinet was divided on the issue.

"We have been talking about the Lebanon issue, at my initiative, for a full year, in an effort to rescue Israel from 20 years of complications with a very difficult problem," Netanyahu said. "We want to defend the northern border and our allies, and it's not easy."

The report came two days after Lebanese guerrillas launched a hail of rockets across Israel's northern border in retaliation for an Israeli air strike that killed a Lebanese woman and her six children. Israel called the civilian deaths an accident. Israel and Shiite Muslim

guerrillas have been engaged in a guerrilla war in Lebanon since 1985. Guerrillas from Hizbollah, along with the Lebanese government and Syria, demand that Israel pull about 2,000 soldiers out of the Israeli-declared security zone in south Lebanon.

David Bar-Ilan, a top aide to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said the prime minister would not withdraw from south Lebanon until security guarantees are in hand.

The report in the daily Maariv newspaper said that Netanyahu and Sharon were intending to bring a plan for a gradual withdrawal from the enclave Israel occupies in south Lebanon for discussion in the cabinet on Sunday.

According to the report, Israel would begin such a phased pullout before elections are held, probably in the next four months.

Opposition lawmaker Efraim Sneh called the reported plan an election ploy for the beleaguered Netanyahu.

Netanyahu said the cabinet would continue to discuss the Lebanon issue irrespective of the elections.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Shai Segal issued a flat denial of the Maariv story and called Sneh's comments "plain evil."

Segal said that Sharon had no intention of making any new Lebanon proposal on Sunday.

The cabinet has been holding ongoing discussions on Lebanon.

The daily Haaretz reported Friday that Netanyahu and opposition leader Ehud Barak had held a round of meetings over the summer at which they agreed to make restarting negotiations with Syria a priority.

Bar-Ilan confirmed that discussions took place between the two, but he denied reports that the topic of land concessions on the Golan Heights ever arose.

The public pressure for a pullout from Lebanon has been mounting along with a steady increase in the death toll among young soldiers serving there. On Friday, 1st Sgt. Doron Bezgri, 26, a border policeman who suffered head injuries in a clash with Hizbollah forces more than three years ago, died without having ever regained consciousness.



MAKING A LIVING IN BAGHDAD: A boy carries a bag filled with pieces of carton that he just collected from the garbage near a market in central Baghdad Saturday. Almost a week after U.S. and British military launch a four-day campaign of air strikes, prospects for an improvement of the economic situation for Iraqis are as dim as they were before, as the eight-year old U.N. embargo remains in place (photo by AP)

Clinton hopes the Senate will act differently than House

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thirty years before the U.S. Civil War, Alexis de Tocqueville, that observant Frenchman who wrote a book explaining what makes America work, poked around the Senate and the House and concluded that the former was superior.

He was "struck by the vulgar demagoguery" of the House, he wrote in "Democracy in America," but thought the Senate was "composed of eloquent advocates, distinguished generals, wise magistrates and statesmen of note."

At any given time, there are probably at least 100 people — all members of the U.S. Senate — who agree.

Bill Clinton, having been impeached by narrow and partisan votes in the House, is surely among those who hope the Senate marches differently. He'd like the Senate, in its wisdom, to spare him a trial or, if it can't work that out, to acquit him and keep him from

becoming the nation's first fired president.

Senators like to see themselves as above the fray, as reasoned and deliberate. They call themselves members of the "upper body."

It is considered bad form for a House member to refer to the Senate in debate as "the Senate" or for a senator to speak of "the House." Instead, each refers to the other body as "the other body."

That attitude came through in the House debate on impeaching Clinton. Republican Rep. Henry Hyde argued that the House constitutionally could not censure the president, even if senators thought they could.

With 435 members, the House is necessarily a more disciplined body, a more partisan one, but, with its leaders running the show, a more manageable one. Members tend to become experts in one narrow area and speak up only when it is before the House.

The Senate, by contrast, comprises 100 individuals, asserting themselves whenever they want to, each able to stop the proceedings at will by simply standing up and giving speeches.

As a result, the House operates by majority rule pure and simple, but the Senate must operate by accommodation and compromise or not at all. There are no backbenchers there.

Except for about 30 districts, smaller House districts are more homogeneous, usually safely Republican or safely Democratic, notes political scientist James Thurber. So representatives need pay scant heed to voters other than those that prevail in their districts.

"I see the Senate as an institution that moderates the House," says Thurber. "I see senators as the adults, in as much as they are more insulated, more mature."

The founding fathers intended for the Senate to be more

deliberative and its six-year terms means most members have years away from having to face the voters, long enough for passions to cool. George Washington is said to have compared the Senate to a saucer into which issues, hot from the House, are poured and get a chance to cool.

Even though senators since 1913 have been elected directly by the voters — in Tocqueville's day they were elected by state legislatures — they can take a more distant view than House members, who are never more than two years from having to face the voters.

The difference was deliberate, says Senate historian Donald Ritchie. "The House was designed to reflect public opinion and the Senate, with six-year terms, was supposed to be removed from prevailing winds."

"The Senate is a club," he says, "and the House a fraternity."

Iran detains supporters of dissident cleric

TEHRAN (AFP) — An Iranian court has remanded in custody several supporters of dissident cleric Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri, the Tehran press reported Saturday.

A special court for Shiite Muslim clerics detained the clergymen after they protested against the "heightened police surveillance" imposed on Montazeri for the past 10 years, the moderate weekly

Aban said. "Mahmoud Khatib, Ali Khatib, Rasul Fathi, Jamshidian, Sharifian and Ahari are among the clerics who have been arrested for circulating petitions in support of Ayatollah Montazeri," the paper said without giving further details. Abasali Fateh, an aide of Montazeri who ran his office, was also detained, it said.

Once the designated successor of the founder of Iran's Islamic Republic Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Montazeri was sidelined in 1989.

The 89-year-old cleric angered conservatives last year by condemning their hold on power and criticizing the growing intervention in policy matters of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Montazeri demanded

greater powers for President Mohammad Khatami and his moderate and left-wing supporters.

Conservatives and hardliners organized protest demonstrations all over Iran and sacked Montazeri's office in the holy city of Qom where he is based. His office in the northeastern pilgrimage city of Mashhad was also closed.

Iraq says planes raid southern post

(Continued from page 1)

"We will accept no other option other than the lifting of the embargo," said the official Al Qadisiya newspaper.

The Babel daily, controlled by President Saddam Hussein's son Uday, also hammered home the message that sanctions imposed after Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait must end.

"Our people, who are still healing their wounds following the imperialist-Zionist aggression, will accept nothing but the lifting of the embargo, it is the goal for which we will fight and sacrifice ourselves."

Iraq's parliament speaker Saadoun Hammadi called for all Arab countries to ignore the embargo, as he set off for Amman for a meeting of the Arab Parliamentary Union (see page 1 story).

"Iraq will stress the need for a total lifting of the embargo by Arab countries and will ask Arab parliamentary leaders to take decisions obliging their governments to act," he told INA. Babel also said it was expecting "nothing good" to come out of efforts by China, Russia and France for an overhaul of U.N. arms inspections.

"Russia has intervened on several occasions in the past to ask Iraq to make difficult concessions, without obtaining anything in return."

"China simply hands out statements from its foreign ministry... and we do not expect anything else."

"As for France, its position is so hesitant and unclear that our people cannot work out whether they are with us or against us," said the paper, accusing Paris of being "opportunistic."

15,000 mark 11th anniversary of Hamas

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Some 15,000 Palestinians gathered Friday in a Gaza Strip refugee camp to mark the 11th anniversary of the creation of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas).

Hamas founder and spiritual guide Sheikh Ahmad Yassin told the crowd that his movement "will continue down our martyrs' path until our land is liberated."

He said Hamas "offered its band to the Palestinian Authority to preserve the unity of the Palestinian people."

Yasser Arafat's Palestinian National Authority placed Yassin under house arrest two months ago after he criticized the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Wye River Memorandum. The house arrest was ended Wednesday.

Hamas opposes the Palestinian autonomy accords with Israel and has claimed responsibility for most of the anti-Israeli attacks in the past five years.

Seven countries confirm attending League meeting

(Continued from page 1)

The eight include Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, whose relations with Baghdad have been hostile since Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

However, Kuwaiti Minister of Information Youssef Al Samit confirmed on Saturday that his country would be ready to attend an Arab summit, so long as it was well prepared.

The purpose of the foreign ministers' meeting, called by Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdul Meguid at the urging of Yemen, is to lay the groundwork for a summit to discuss Iraq in the aftermath of the U.S.-British air strikes. So far only Yemen and Morocco have supported calls

JMA to send physicians to examine prisoners in Israel

(Continued from page 1)

The families of the 14 prisoners in October said the prisoners were suffering from serious health problems and urged the government to do its utmost to secure their release. In a statement they issued then, the families said: "All the prisoners suffer from deteriorating psychological and health conditions as a result of their prolonged and unjustified detention and poor living conditions."

Rifai stressed that the embassy is putting the prisoners issue on the top of its agenda and is visiting them every week.

"Our aim is to secure the release of all Jordanian prisoners in Israel," Rifai said. "But until this goal is achieved, we are using every possible effort and exerting all pressure in order to win the release of all our prisoners. We hope our efforts will lead to positive results soon."

The prisoners had been held in two jails in Shata and Nafha

before their recent transfer to the Ashkelon prison in southern Israel upon a request by the Jordanian authorities.

During the past four years, Tel Aviv freed more than 20 Jordanian prisoners who were caught infiltrating into Israel or jailed to their affiliation to banned Palestinian groups.

Israel says the remaining 14 prisoners are convicted of serious offences, such as fatal attacks on Israelis. The Jewish state insists that they spend their prison terms in Israel, while Jordan is seeking their handover to Jordanian custody.

However informed sources said that "in addition to the 14 Jordanian imprisoned on security charges, there are six more held in Israel for criminal offences."

Israel freed most Jordanian prisoners in its jails more than one year ago in exchange for two Mossad agents who attempted to assassinate Khaled Misha'al, a leading member of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas.

U.S. should do more to help Kingdom develop new foreign investment strategy — former envoy

By George S. Hishmeh

WASHINGTON — "The United States needs to do more to help Jordan develop a new foreign investment strategy... to help lay the groundwork for a minimum \$200 million in private sector investment over the next two years," a former U.S. ambassador has told a closed meeting here of the influential Washington Institute for Near East policy.

Former U.S. Ambassador Marc C. Ginsberg, who was until recently his country's envoy to Morocco, released the text of his remarks to the Jordan Times on Friday.

The ambassador served in Rabat from 1993-1996, where he helped launch the first of four Middle East-North Africa (MENA) economic conferences, the economic flipside of the Middle East peace process. Subsequently, he was named U.S. coordinator for Mediterranean Trade, Investment and National Security Affairs.

At present, Ginsberg is president of a firm he founded called Georgetown Global Investments Corporation, which according to its mission statement, "focuses on developing strategic, non-speculative stakes in medium to large capitalised companies, with special emphasis on the energy, telecommunications, information technology, real estate and manufacturing sectors."

A former assistant secretary of the Commerce Department official, Judith

Barnet, has been named vice president of the new firm. She too was very involved in the MENA process, which has been in limbo as a result of continued Israeli intransigence.

Ginsberg was reporting to the institute on a recent trip he made to the region as a member of the Washington Institute-led group. The group, which included the executive director of the institute, Robert Satloff, visited Kuwait, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian National Authority-ruled areas.

Ginsberg also suggested that the United States should help "accelerate [Jordan's] privatisation programme to help better capitalise its stock market to attract more foreign investment."

While in Amman, Ginsberg said he discussed with U.S. Ambassador William Burns the "organising [of] a trade mission of Jordanian private sector officials" to the United States. He explained that the mission will "help lay the groundwork for a private investment conference marking a new Israeli/Palestinian/Jordanian QIZ [Qualified Industrial Zone] abutting the Jordan River."

Ginsberg said he had "a solemn message" to the group about Jordan's "difficult" economic situation and expressed hope that his "warning resonates throughout the government and people of Israel and in [the U.S.] administration and beyond."

He said Jordan was facing "a bleak economic winter." He pointed out that

the country is under "economic siege" from Syria which, he charged, is "meddling once again in Jordan's internal affairs — this time with more vehemence than in the past."

He did not provide any examples except to say that the Syrian regime "has elected to warm its ties with [Iraqi President] Saddam Hussein as a means of diverting Jordanian trade with Iraq — a major economic lifeline for our friends in Amman." He continued, "Syria's extensive and pervasive attacks on King Hussein and the Hashemite monarchy in recent weeks should not go unnoticed in Washington." The former ambassador did not say whether he would be meeting with State Department officials on the matter.

Moreover, he added, "The situation with Jordan's economic ties to the PNA and with Israel have not produced the desired peace dividend which one would have hoped from the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty."

He thought each side "shares some responsibility for this." Ginsberg said Jordanians complained that they have not seen "any tangible economic change in their lives since the peace treaty." While the QIZ in Irbid is "a promising opening," he added, "the expected and needed level of foreign investment to secure the foundation for peace has simply not materialised — at least not yet."

The former ambassador was also critical of Israel for continuing "to impose

non-tariff barriers to trade with Jordan." He said Israel's ambassador in Amman, Oded Eran, claimed that he "simply cannot understand why Israel should permit Jordanian trucks into Israel which have 'balding tires and tired drivers.'"

The Israeli ambassador added, "we have enough crazy drivers and unsafe vehicles on our highways."

Ginsberg added: "When scores of trucks laden with Jordanian agricultural goods are turned back at the Allenby Bridge, where is the goodwill and the effort at accommodation by the government of Israel?"

The ambassador continued: "While it is clear that Israel's political ties with Jordan have improved in recent months, their economic ties have not achieved the desired level to head off political disension throughout Jordan against its peace treaty with Israel."

In turn, Ginsberg noted that Jordanian professional associations refuse to deal with Israelis "making it virtually impossible to develop the necessary economic ties throughout Jordan's economy."

Ginsberg thought Jordan should agree to entering into a free-trade agreement with Israel, as offered by the Israeli government. Jordan's reluctance to do that was cited by him as one reason for the "paucity" of trade with Israel.

In Amman, Ginsberg said he met with HRH Crown Prince Hassan, prime minister and foreign minister and with Omar Salah, whom he described as "the man behind the QIZ success in Irbid."



Onboard computer navigator forgets to mention ferry

POTSDAM (AP) — A German couple out for a Christmas drive near Berlin ended up in a river — apparently because their onboard computer navigator forgot to mention they had to wait for a ferry. The 57-year-old driver and his passenger were not injured in the accident, police said Saturday. The couple was out driving Friday night when they came to Caputh, where a ferry operates across the Havel River. That information, however, apparently was never stored in the satellite-steered navigation system they were using, police said. The driver kept going straight in the dark, expecting a bridge, and ended up in the water.

A candlelit Christmas — thousands without power

NEW YORK (AP) — People in the southern United States enjoyed an unusual gift for Christmas Day — snow. But it came with a price, as hundreds of thousands were without electricity. The freezing rain, sleet and snow that crippled the region Christmas Eve left thousands of utility workers spending their holiday trying to restore power lines. "Mother nature does not really pay attention to the calendars and programmed holidays," said Bob Cayler, spokesman for the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency.

Peru grants Christmas pardons to innocent people

LIMA (AFP) — The government Friday pardoned and freed seven people jailed unfairly on terrorist charges in celebration of Christmas, prison officials announced.

The order to free the seven prisoners was signed by President Alberto Fujimori, published in Peru's official newspaper and carried out immediately. "It was a surprise. I was in my cell and they said I had to come out, and I did," said Jose Luis Gutierrez Vivanco, still surprised at recovering his freedom. The orders to free the seven stemmed from a special commission created by the government in 1996 to study cases of abuses by counterinsurgency forces or the anonymous system of masked judges.

Probe into Schiffer-Copperfield rumours closes

MUNICH (AFP) — German legal officials have closed a probe into press reports that claimed the relationship between German supermodel Claudia Schiffer and American celebrity magician David Copperfield was a front designed to boost their images. The investigation was being wound up because there was no trace of the source of the story, which appeared in popular German magazine Bunte and other publications in 1997, officials from the Munich public prosecutor's office said. The reports had claimed Schiffer, 28, and Copperfield, 42, gave the appearance of being a couple but the relationship was no more than a business agreement.

Soft drugs on demand? German doctors say no

BONN (AP) — A suggestion by Germany's health minister to allow pharmacies to sell small amounts of soft recreational drugs was rejected Friday by the main doctors' association. Andrea Fischer, health minister in the new centre-left government, floated the idea this week, saying it could keep casual users from moving to more dangerous substances by "separating the markets for soft and hard drugs." Karsten Vilmor, head of the German Chamber of Doctors, disagreed. He called the proposal "a false liberalisation" that would give a state stamp of approval to drug use and actually lead more young people into addiction.